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GOVERNMENT DOCK-YARD
WORKERS IN PORTSMOUTH
1793 - 1815

(Two Volumes)

Volume I

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Abstract

The central concern of this thesis is the experiences and attitudes of the Dock Yard workers in the years between 1793 and 1815. In particular, our concern is with the attitude of the Yard workmen towards their employers, the embezzlement of naval stores, the popular radicalism of the seventeen nineties and food prices. All of these areas have attracted the attention of historians of the eighteenth century so that there are a number of historiographical problems to be confronted. The concept of a "moral economy" and historians' treatment of eighteenth century trade unionism are of special interest in this study.

Clearly, we are able to obtain only a partial view of the Yard workers. Once they pass beyond the Dock Yard gates we lose sight of them in the streets and alleys of the town and we are unable to follow them into their pubs and homes. Only when the Yard acts collectively or find themselves in court are we able to see them outside their work situation. Therefore some thought must be given to Dock Yard administration and Admiralty policy. Even so, it must be remembered that Portsmouth Yard was but one part of a national administrative system which was run from London. For this reason policy matters and administration are only considered when they impinge on the lives of the Yard workers.

Naval shipbuilding and repairing in Portsmouth established a skilled and well paid permanent labour force. The cooperative nature of shipbuilding, the close social ties created by geographical propinquity and kinship, the need to safe-guard their interests against their

masters, and the training in organisation and management they received by being in government service, gave the Yard workers a strong desire to influence issues affecting their lives. The areas of their involvement ranged from the Poor Law to food supply. It was their ability to realise through joint action their desire for some control over the quality of their lives that united the Dock Yard workers into a community. Moreover, their influence as a group was felt in the town as a whole.

Though the Yard workers are seen as central to Portsmouth society, they were but one part of it. Other groups were involved in the town and the interaction between them and the Yard workers created a wider community than just the Yard artisans. However, the town community was not based on consensus and harmony. Conflict between groups helps us to trace the pattern of interaction and highlight the complex of values which held the townsfolk together. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is twofold. On the one hand, we wish to isolate and identify the Yard workers as a social group; on the other, we wish to analyse and measure their involvement in the local society of which they were part.

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Abbreviations used in this thesis

B.M.Add.Mss.	British Museum Additional Manuscripts.
<u>Econ.Hist.R.</u>	<u>Economic History Review</u>
<u>Eng.Hist.Rev.</u>	<u>English Historical Review</u>
<u>Hants.Ch.&Co.</u>	<u>Hampshire Chronicle and Courier</u>
<u>Hants.Co.</u>	<u>Hampshire Courier</u>
<u>Hants.R.</u>	<u>Hampshire Repository</u>
<u>Hants.Tel.</u>	<u>Hampshire Telegraph</u>
<u>I.R.S.H.</u>	<u>International Review of Social History</u>
L.S.E.	London School of Economics
<u>M.M.</u>	<u>Mariners Mirror</u>
N.M.M.	National Maritime Museum
P.C.L.	Portsmouth Central Library
P.C.R.O.	Portsmouth City Record Office
<u>Ports.Ch.</u>	<u>Portsmouth Chronicle</u>
<u>Ports.G.</u>	<u>Portsmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser</u>
P.P.	Parliamentary Papers
P.R.O.	Public Records Office
<u>P.S.J</u>	<u>Portsea, Portsmouth and Gosport Journal</u>
S.G.P.	Simon Goodrich Papers
S.M.	Science Museum

Introduction

The word community is used in our analysis of Portsmouth between 1793 and 1815 in a very simple way; there is no desire to embroil this study in the debate over the word and its usefulness as a concept¹. For this work, three aspects of community are important. First is locality. The area examined is one defined by administrative units : the parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea, which were partially united within the Parliamentary Borough of Portsmouth. Secondly we are interested in the institutions and organisations of this locality. These cover a wide range of phenomena: crime, poverty, political, social and economic voluntary organisations and the agencies of local and national government. Because official records are one of the main sources for this study, the institutional aspect of community is emphasised. However, this bias is justified because many of the phenomena described powerfully influenced the lives of the area's inhabitants, and because they provide the only means of approaching an understanding of the third aspect of the community, attitudes. A community is often distinguished in terms of commonly held values and beliefs. This study leads to the conclusion that the men working in the Dock Yard held a set of shared views based on the nature of the employment offered in the Dock Yard.

The first chapter describes the general economic and social history of Portsmouth during 1793 - 1815, with the aim of giving some idea of

¹ M.R. ^hFrankenberg, Communities in Britain (1966). M. Stacey, The Myth of Community Studies, British Journal of Sociology 20 (1969) pp 134 - 147. D.B. Clark, The Concept of Community : A Re-examination. The Sociological Review 21 (1973) pp 397 - 416.

its social structure. The second chapter outlines the history, administration and function of the Dock Yard. This section is important because it describes the employment conditions of the Yard workers. After explaining the technicalities of shipbuilding and outlining the occupational groupings in the Yard, we go on to consider labour disputes. This is followed by an examination of crime, first within the Yard and then in the town as a whole. This takes us beyond the precincts of the Dock Yard and we continue to expand the area of study by looking at food riots and political radicalism. Our main aim is to ascertain the role of the Yard workers in these activities. Finally the conclusion seeks to summarize and explain the most characteristic social traits of the Yard people.

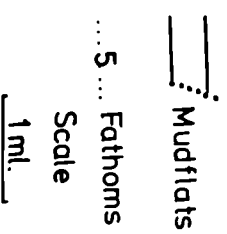
CHAPTER I THE TOWN

Introduction to Chapter I

Forming a general idea of the physical and social world inhabited by the Yard workers must be our first task. No adequate general history of Portsmouth exists and this chapter does not attempt to fill that gap; rather it concentrates on those areas which will enable us to understand more readily topics dealt with in later chapters. For example, some knowledge of the political complexion of the town is needed when we examine popular radicalism, and a consideration of the Poor Law is useful in relation to studying crime. Moreover, we need to refer constantly to the town's geography. The chapter is organised as follows:

- 1) Portsmouth, its locality and population.
- 2) The Borough, parishes and politics.
- 3) Poor Law Administration.
- 4) Conclusion.

Portdown Hill

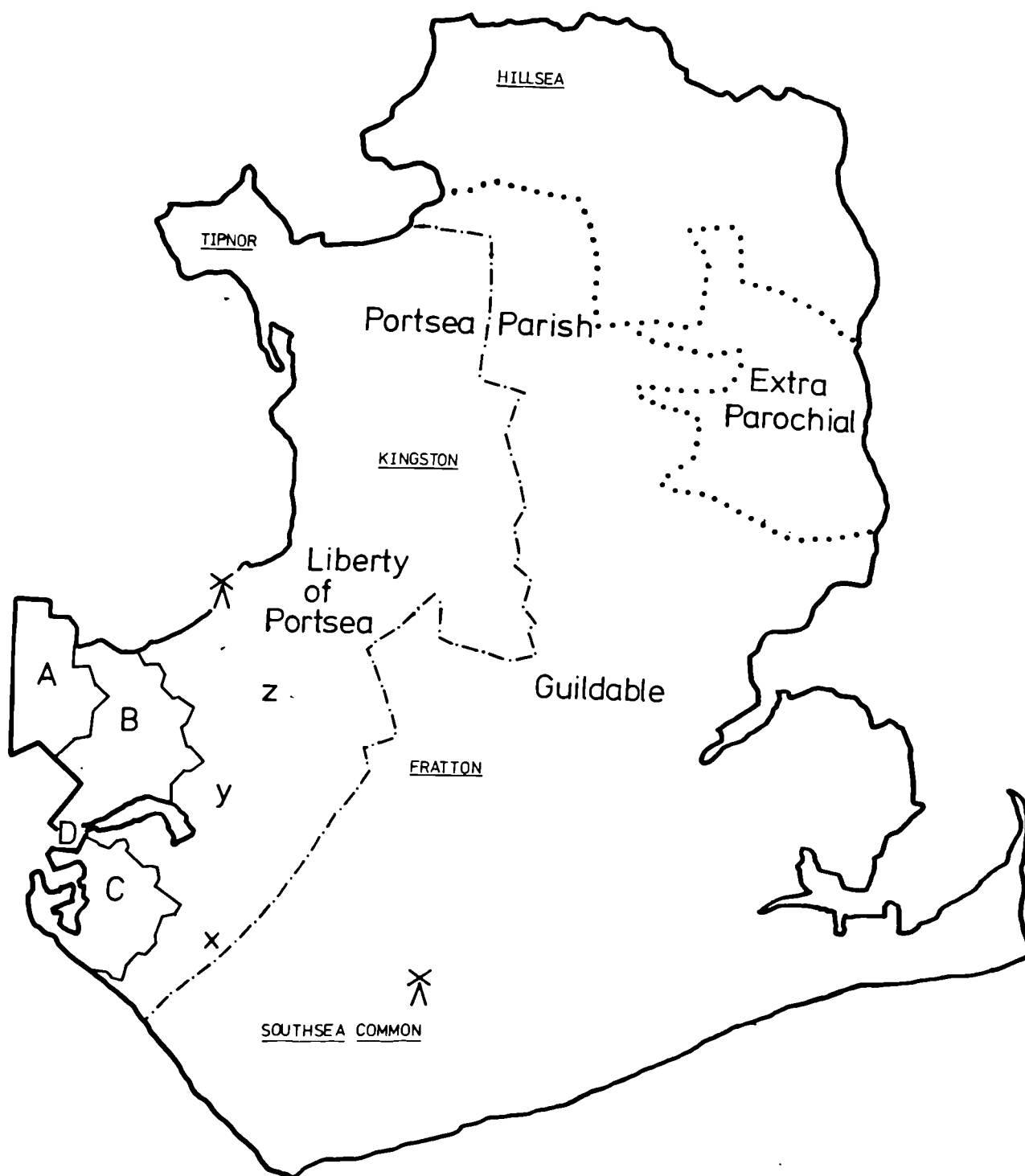


Key to Map 1.1²

Portsea Island

.....	Parish boundaries
—•—•—•	Borough boundary
	Dock Mill Society Mill sites
A	The Dock Yard
B	Portsea Town
C	Portsmouth Town
D	The Gun Wharf
Z	Halfway Houses
Y	Cold Harbour
X	Croxton Town

Map 1.2 Portsea Island



Portsmouth and Its Locality

The aim of this section is to lay the necessary foundation for considering the social structure and composition of the town by describing Portsmouth from several points of view: (a) the physical geography and political boundaries; (b) townscape, urban development and population; (c) the Economy.

As the premier naval base of the world's greatest seapower, eighteenth century Portsmouth was an important and famous place, the ninth largest town in England. Though one is hardly aware of the fact today, Portsmouth sprawls across the flat island of Portsea (see Maps 1.1 and 1.2).

Immediately to the north of Portsea Island rises Portsdown Hill reaching an altitude of about four hundred feet. Over it the main road from London climbed. One observer noted how the approaches to the area were lined by piles of timber ready to be carried to the Dock Yard¹. From the summit of the hill the island would have appeared almost flat and lightly wooded with an indented shoreline fringed by large areas of marsh. In the far distance the Isle of Wight might be visible on a clear day. Between it and the Portsmouth shore would lie, at times, what must have been one of the finest sights of the eighteenth century: fleets of sailing ships riding at anchor. On the west side of the island the twin towns of Portsmouth and Portsea were distinctly marked out by their fortifications, the tower of St Thomas's being a clear landmark, the rest of the town being screened by tall trees growing upon the ramparts. A little before these, spreading out towards the hilltop viewer for a mile, would be seen the suburbs. In front of the houses was farmland.

¹ W. Gilpin, Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent made in ... 1774, (1804).

Behind Portsea stood the crowded buildings of the Dock Yard and vessels at the wharves. In the harbour there would lie a variety of vessels and craft including the reserve fleet (the Ordinary) and prison hulks anchored a line in the creeks.

To the southeast of the urban area stretched an extensive shingle beach and morass known as Southsea Common, which continued eastward to the spit on which Fort Cumberland stood. Among the marshy areas along the eastern coast were salterns. The northern edge of the island was marked by a narrow water way which was crossed at one point by a fortified bridge.

From our description of Portsmouth it is clear that military fortifications were a notable feature of the area. The most impressive defences were those guarding the town itself. These Defoe described:

"As to the strength of the Town by Land, the works are very large and numerous, and besides the Battery at the Point aforesaid, there is a large Hornwork on the Southside, running out towards Southsea Castle; there is also a good Counterscarp, and double Mote, with Ravelins in the Ditch and double Pallisades and advanced works to the place from any approach where it may be practicable. The strength of the Town is considerably augmented on the Land-side by the Fortifications raised in King William's time about the Docks and Yards, which are now perfect, and those parts make a particular strength by themselves; and tho' they are in some sense independent of one another, yet they cover and strengthen one another so they cannot be separately attacked on that side, while they are in the same hands."¹

Portsea's defences were of an even greater extent than those built by De Gomme for the mother town, though modelled on them. Started in 1710, they were not completed until 1809². The troops who manned all these works were housed in barracks in Portsmouth at Halfway Houses and at Hillsea.

¹ D. Defoe, A Tour Thro' The Whole Island of Great Britain (1720-24) pp136-139.

² A. Corney, Fortification in Old Portsmouth (Portsmouth 1963).
B.R. Masters, Portsmouth through the centuries (Portsmouth 1968)
F.N. Pope, A Historical Review of the Fortifications of Portsmouth (Typescript, Portsmouth City Library 1961).

The island was also well defended from the seaward side, and Defoe gave a good description of these fortifications:

"The situation of this Place is such that it is chosen, as may well be said, for the best security of the Navy above all other places in Britain; the Entrance into the Harbour is safe but very narrow, guarded on both sides by terrible Platforms of Cannon, particularly on the Point; which is a Suburb of Portsmouth so called, where there is a Brick Platform built with two Tire (sic) of Guns, One over another, and which can Fire so in Cover, that the Gunners cannot be beaten from their Guns, or their Guns be easily dismounted; the other is from the Point of land on the side of Gosport, which they call Gilkicker where they have Two Batteries. Before any Ships attempt to enter this Port by Sea, they must also pass the Cannon of the main Platform of the Garrison and also another at Southsea castle; so that it is next to impossible that any ship could match them and force their way into the Harbour; in which I speak the Judgement of Men well acquainted with such matters as my own opinion ..."

"... the Mouth or entrance into Portsmouth is narrow, and may be locked up with booms, which before the ships could break, and while they were lying at them to break them away they would be torn to pieces by the Battery at the Point at Portsmouth ..."¹

Southsea castle was a Tudor work and it was supplemented by later defences along the shore. Fort Cumberland at the eastern extremity of the island was being extended during the Revolutionary Wars. By this time, Pitt and Richmond had ensured that Portsmouth was better defended than during the American Wars.²

The task of Portsmouth's defences was to protect its naval facilities and harbour which lay at the heart of the area's economy (Map 1.1).

A broad shallow lagoon to the west of Portsea Island formed the harbour. Its mouth was very narrow and approached by a channel which ran parallel to the coast. A bar at the harbour entrance was impassable for large ships except at high tide. Within the lagoon

¹ D. Defoe, op.cit.

² A. Temple Patterson. The Other Armada (1960).

only the main creeks could float a vessel of any size; the rest of the harbour was mainly marsh. Though the haven could become crowded, there was an extensive roadstead at Spithead:

"Spithead is the outer harbour of Portsmouth; it is formed by the Isle of Wight, which forms a natural breakwater, leaving a channel from about three to four miles wide between it and the mainland, which is called the Solent: it lies about two miles south of Portsmouth Point, and is in a fine roadstead with good holding ground, and well protected from all winds except from south to south east, when a heavy swell sets in from that quarter: still the Horse and Warner sands break the swell considerably, so that well found vessels seldom drive from their moorings. With heavy westerly gales setting down the Solent there is also a certain degree of swell which at times prevents small boats from communicating with vessels at anchor at Spithead; but large vessels well found, ride easily and without danger of drifting from their anchors. The anchorage of Spithead taken between the Horse buoy on the southern end of the Horse Sand and Gillycker Point on the north is about four miles long and varies from one eighth to one and three quarters mile wide, with from eight to seventeen fathoms of low water of spring tides so that there is room for the most powerful fleets to ride in safety."

"From what has been stated, Portsmouth may be considered as a natural harbour of the first class. It has ample space, depth of water, good holding ground, and protection from three fourths of the compass and considerable facility of access and departure. The bar at the entrance of the inner harbour is certainly a defect Its situation, moreover, is extremely favourable either for attack or defence, being as it were in the centre of the front of the island, before which all the commerce of Europe must pass, and within a short distance of the metropolis ..."¹

Portsmouth's situation opposite the mouth of the Seine meant that it played a major part in any war with France. As Defoe remarked:

"There is also this note to be put upon the two great Arsenals of England, Portsmouth and Chatham; namely that they thrive by a War as the War respects their situation, (viz) when a War with France happens or with Spain then Portsmouth grows rich, and when a War with Holland, or any of the powers of the North then Chatham and Woolwich and Deptford are in request..."²

¹ Sir J. Rennie, The Theory Formation and Construction of British and Foreign Harbours (1851-54) p66.

² D. Defoe, op.cit.

For Mediterranean and Atlantic campaigns, however, Plymouth was more convenient. During the years that the French coast was under close blockade, Plymouth had a certain advantage over Portsmouth in that an easterly wind which would enable a French Fleet to leave Brest and drive off the English squadrons, made it difficult for reinforcements to leave Spithead which, in these circumstances, was one hundred and thirty miles leeward of Brest. St. Vincent, the architect of the close blockade (rigorously enforced for much of the Napoleonic wars) discouraged his captains from putting into port, especially Spithead, without very good reason.¹

Political Boundaries

The area referred to as Portsmouth contained several administrative units. The main concern of this study is the urban areas which made up the towns of Portsmouth and Portsea. The former, defined by its walls, was co-extensive with the parish of Portsmouth, St. Thomas. The rest of the island was mainly within the parish Portsea whose church, St. Mary's, was at Kingston. The northern part of the island lay within Wymering parish, while a large area to the east was 'extra-parochial' and Crown land. The Parliamentary Borough included Portsmouth and Portsea towns and part of the rest of Portsea parish, this last area being known as the Liberty of Portsea. The part beyond the Borough Boundary was known as the Guildable. Both parishes were within the Portsdown division of the county. For most administrative purposes no distinction appears to have been made between the Guildable and the

¹ A. Mahan, Influences of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire 1793 - 1812 (1892).

Liberty; for instance they shared the same Poor House. The fact that members of Portsmouth Corporation were also County magistrates, as were some other leading inhabitants, must have facilitated the tasks of local government.

Townscape and Urban Development

The general topography of Portsmouth and its environs has already been sketched. Here a more detailed examination will be made of the conditions that nature and man created in Portsmouth. First, the different zones of urban development are considered; then patterns of growth; and finally, the sanitary condition of the human environment is described. The oldest area of urban development was Portsmouth, marked by its walls. Rapid suburban growth took place during the eighteenth century on the Common between the town and the Dock Yard, and around old agricultural settlements within a mile or so of the town. The urban area on the common grew into a town which exceeded Portsmouth in size and was eventually fortified. In the early nineteenth century entirely new areas of housing were put up, notably on Southsea Common. Thus there was a four fold division: Portsmouth, the area of housing on the common which became Portsea, old suburbs, and new suburbs. Using these divisions, distinctions can be made between them in social terms.

Portsmouth was the administrative centre for the entire area. Here the Corporation met and elected M.P.s, here, the Quarter Sessions sat and the magistrates held petty sessions and summary proceedings. The magistrates were also available for administrative duties related to the Poor and Settlement Laws. The town also contained the offices of

the Ordnance, Victualling Departments and Customs service, as well as the garrison headquarters and barracks. Further, Portsmouth was a commercial and trading centre with a civilian dock known as the Camber, borough market and waggon and coach services. Thus many of Portsmouth's inhabitants were either associated with these varied institutions or else navy and army officers. The area, therefore, had the appropriate services: good inns, fine shops, assembly rooms and a theatre. One neighbourhood provided similar facilities for sailors and soldiers. This was the Point, a peninsula which lay beyond the town's main walls forming the seaward side of the camber. The atmosphere of the neighbourhood has been captured by Rowlandson in a well known etching. Jewish money-lenders, drunken sailors and grasping whores fill the picture in a crazy juxtaposition. The main thoroughfare of the area was Broad Street.

"This street is filled with one of the most heterogeneous assemblages of traffic and conviviality that is, perhaps, to be found in the same extent in any one street in any part of the world. Liquor shops, contract taverns, Jew shopmen, taylor and drapers, jostle Christian pawnbrokers, watch jobbers and trinket merchants: cook-shops, eating houses and ordinaries vie with each other to entertain all classes."¹

Attempts, however, were made to confine this sort of scene to one locality, though the New Buildings and the Hard in Portsea may have been very similar.² The rest of that town, however, seems to have been more sombre. Even the Point had a more serious aspect being the site of commercial docks and warehouses.

¹ Hants Tel. 1805 quoted in W.G. Gates Portsmouth in the Past (1972) p.16.

² See below p. 447

A contemporary writer noted the difference between Portsmouth and Portsea:

"Portsea and its vicinity are inhabited chiefly by the artificers and labourers belonging to the dock-yard, and by shopkeepers, and the dock-yard is the principal support of its trade."¹

Despite this statement, a trade directory for 1798 indicates that Portsea had a considerable body of professional men. Portsea was served by a larger number of physicians and attorneys than Portsmouth.² Differences in the size of the two towns might explain the larger number of professional men in Portsea, but those differences also indicate that the inhabitants there were fairly prosperous.

Accounts of the two towns varied; to some visitors the whole of the area was nasty, crowded and unhealthy; others distinguished Portsmouth as being more substantial with better buildings and wider streets than Portsea. Indeed, even local inhabitants complained of Portsea that:

"The streets etc. in this town are in general narrow and the Houses and Buildings in some of them (particularly those first built) project beyond each other, some standing wholly and others partly in recesses of different depths and others irregularly with those ranging on each side of them."³

Some evidence also suggests that many of Portsea's buildings were of timber, leading to concern about the danger of fire.⁴ Conditions in both towns were improved by Acts for lighting and paving. Local writers and authors of the guide books cited were anxious to refute representations

¹ Monthly Magazine 11 (1801) p.401.

² Universal Dictionary of Trades, Commerce and Maintenance 4 (1798) Current research by Mr. P. Christie of the Department of Geography, Portsmouth Polytechnic supports the inference that Portsea had a disproportionate number of professional men.

³ P.C.R.O. G/1/CP/4 Improvement Commissioner's Proceedings p.86

⁴ The Wynne Diaries ed. Anne Freemantle II (1937) p.86.

of Portsmouth as unwholesome.

Our period saw the growth and development of Portsmouth's suburbs. Part of this expansion was probably due to an increased population, but part was the result of a move away from the old urban areas. One writer noted of Portsmouth's tradesmen in 1801:

".... on the skirts of the town, they boast their fine gravel-walks, gardens and variegated parterres. Here they have their chateaus their villas and bowers, and in these they display more Attic taste than arcadian simplicity. The ornaments they have lavished on them are of the chastest order, cases, golden ball, lions heads, venuses, dolphins and floating banners, are highly appropriate and emblematical"¹

This passage suggests that the town's nouveaux riches, tradesmen made prosperous by the war, were moving out to Fratton, Buckland and Kingston. However, recent work suggests that the shopkeepers were not the only people to move out of town.² Though Southsea was to become "a middle class outlier of the Dock Yard and garrison", it began as the "essentially artisan Croxton Town".³ It is possible, however, that the middle class character of Southsea was established quite early as a large dinner party was given every year by the proprietors for the inhabitants. The latter were "a select and respectable company" who expressed "... many suitable and appropriate sentiments".⁴

¹ Monthly Magazine 12 (1801) p.114

² R.C. Riley, The Growth of Southsea as a Naval Satellite and Victorian Resort (Portsmouth Paper No.16 1972).

³ Ibid. Croxton consisted of 74 households in 1810.

⁴ Hants. Co. 23.8.1813. Alternatively this may reflect the character
" " 19.8..8.5. of Portsmouth's artisans.

Development

A map of 1688 by the Dutch military engineer De Gomme, shows Portsmouth as a pleasant town of wide streets and many gardens.¹ At that date there was little development beyond the town wall but this was to change dramatically in the next century. To the north of Portsmouth, beyond the mill pond, on the common which lay in front of the Dock Yard, Portsea had grown, by 1800, from nothing to a community of nearly fifteen thousand. An improvement Act of 1792 changed the name of this area from Portsmouth Common to the Town of Portsea. Development in Portsmouth itself, was severely restricted by fortifications, though property advertisements and the rate books bear witness to a certain amount of infilling of courts, yards and gardens and the conversion of outbuildings to domestic use. The limits of this sort of expansion are shown by reference to the number of houses enumerated in the census (see Table 1.1). One contemporary commentator, however, said that the census was mistaken and that building had taken place to a considerable extent.² The redevelopment of facilities within the garrison, while increasing building activity, probably tended to reduce the housing stock. Similar limits were placed on Portsea Town when its own fortifications were completed, though there would appear to have been greater housing development inside Portsea's walls than within Portsmouth's. For example, between 1790 and 1815 nearly forty new courts, rows and places found their way into the rate book for Portsea Town. These new housing areas tended to be small, just a few inhabitations, often less than ten, and were concentrated in the southern half of the town.

¹ N.M.M. P/42 Collection of Maps and plans of Portsmouth 1666-89.

² B.M. ADD.MSS. 4001. Howard Papers.

Table 1.1 The Number of Houses in Portsmouth
1801, 1811 and 1821.

	1801	1811	1	1821	2
Portsmouth Town and Parish	1134	1090	3.8	1196	9.2
Portsea Town and Parish	4419	5863	29	8059	28
Total	5553	6953	20	9255	25

Columns 1 and 2 percentage change.

Sir Frederick Eden estimated that there were 3050 houses in Portsea Parish in 1797.

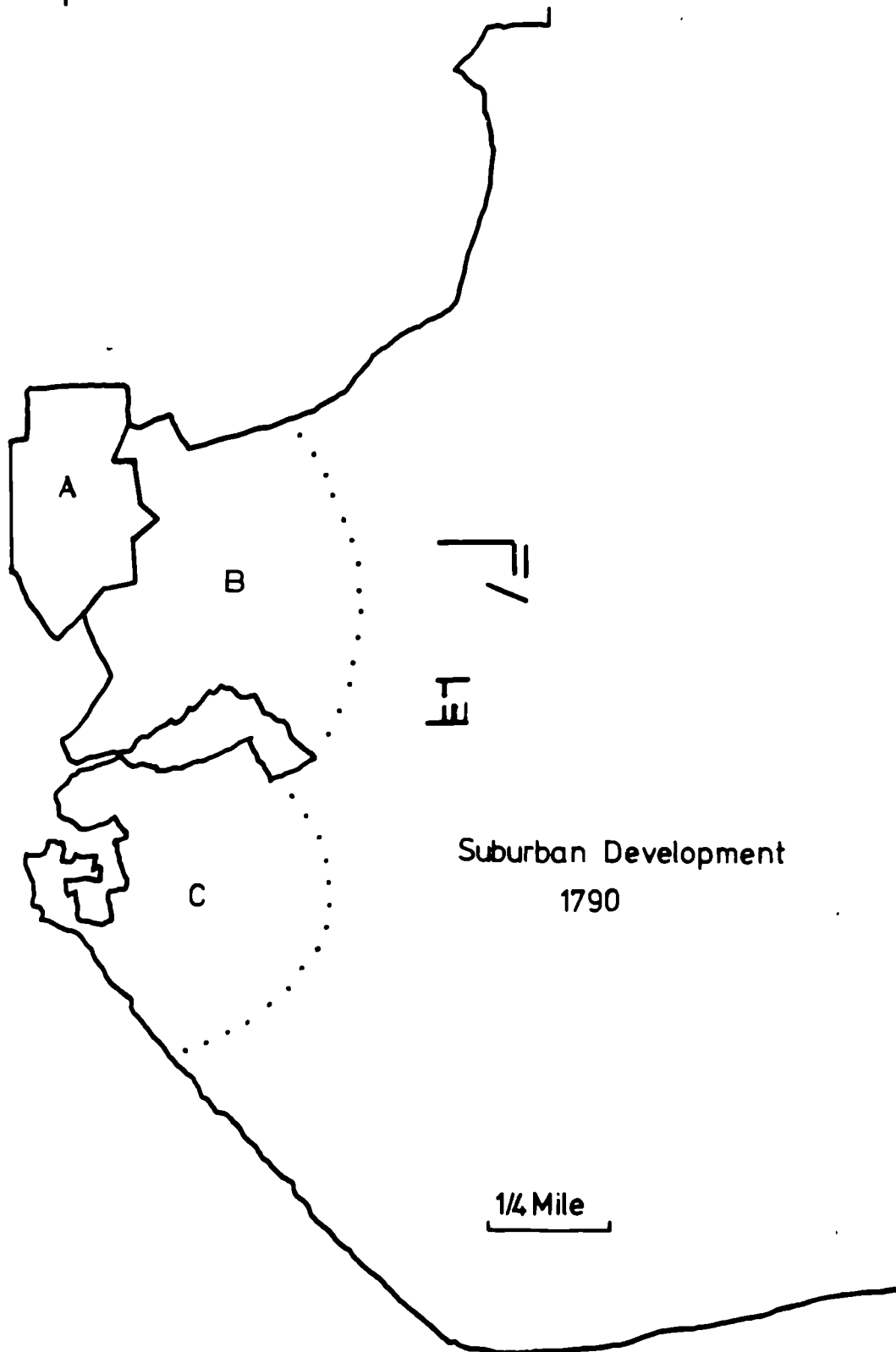
Further suburbs of Portsmouth developed around the ancient hamlet of Cold Harbour and at Halfway Houses, founded about 1720, which gradually merged with each other. Within a mile the two towns of Kingston and Fratton spread along the main London road.

Mapping the streets listed in the rate-books for 1790 and 1815 illustrates the rapid suburban growth which accompanied the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Maps 1.3 and 1.4 are neither comprehensive nor entirely accurate; they indicate only the areas where building was going on, not the number or density of the houses. Nevertheless, the rate books do serve as a rough guide to the main areas of urban development. As indicated by the maps, these were Southsea, Halfway Houses, Fratton and Kingston.

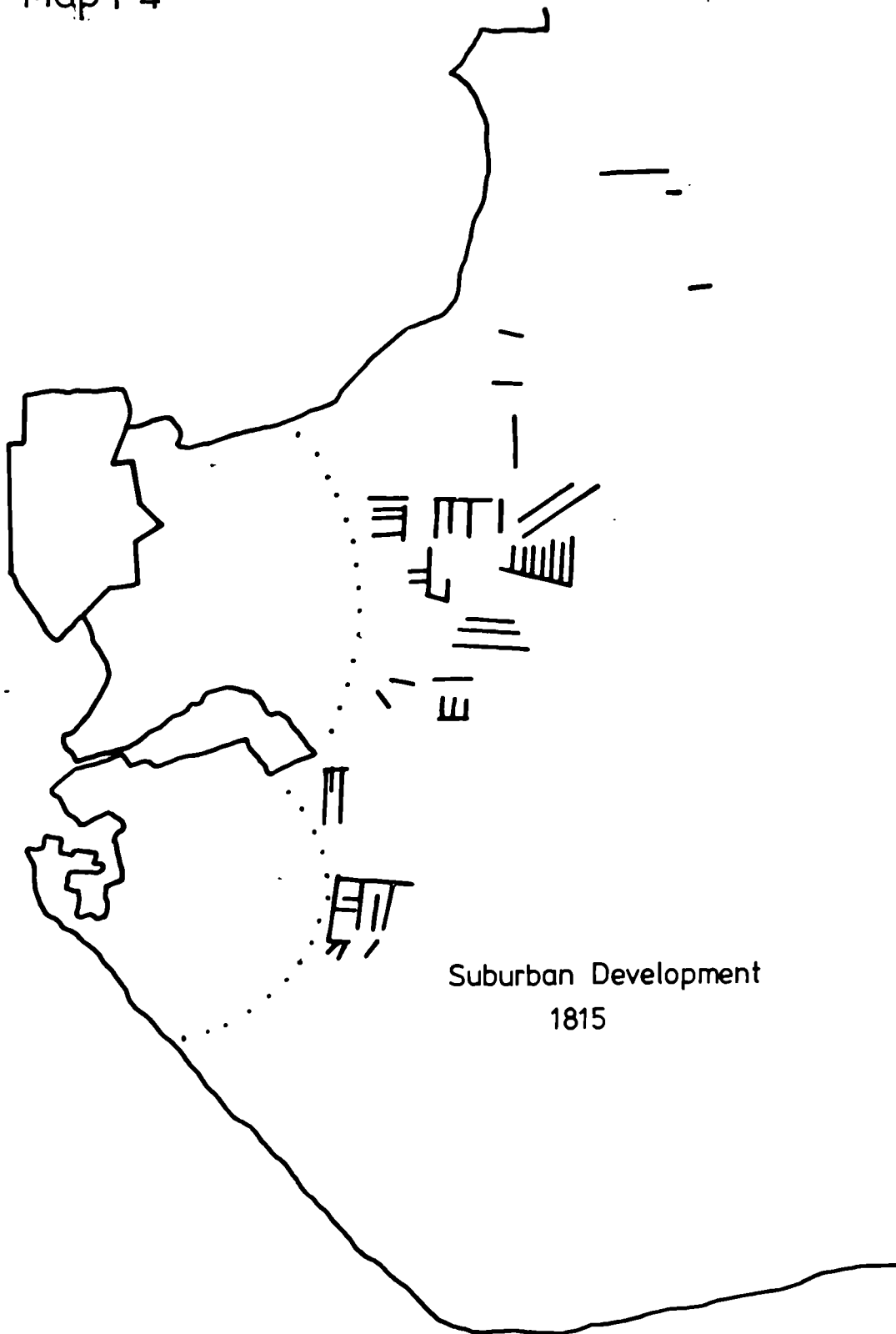
Though it is easy to identify the main areas of suburban growth, it is more difficult to measure the rate of expansion over time. Of the streets listed in the rate-books for 1815 and not appearing in the books for 1790, one-sixth were built before 1796; one-sixth appeared between 1796 and 1806; and the remaining two thirds were listed for the first time between 1806 and 1815. Can we be more precise in identifying the periods of greatest growth?

Sir Frederick Eden in his State of the Poor gave housing figures for 1795 to which we can add data from the census (see Table 1.13). Taking the figures for Portsea (because those for Portsmouth are virtually static), between 1795 and 1801, the stock of inhabitable housing grew at about 10% per annum. Between 1801 and 1811, it expanded at 2.9% and increased 3.2% per year from 1811 to 1821. The high figure for the late seventeen-nineties contrasts with the data obtained from the rate-books, which suggest that few new streets were built during those years.

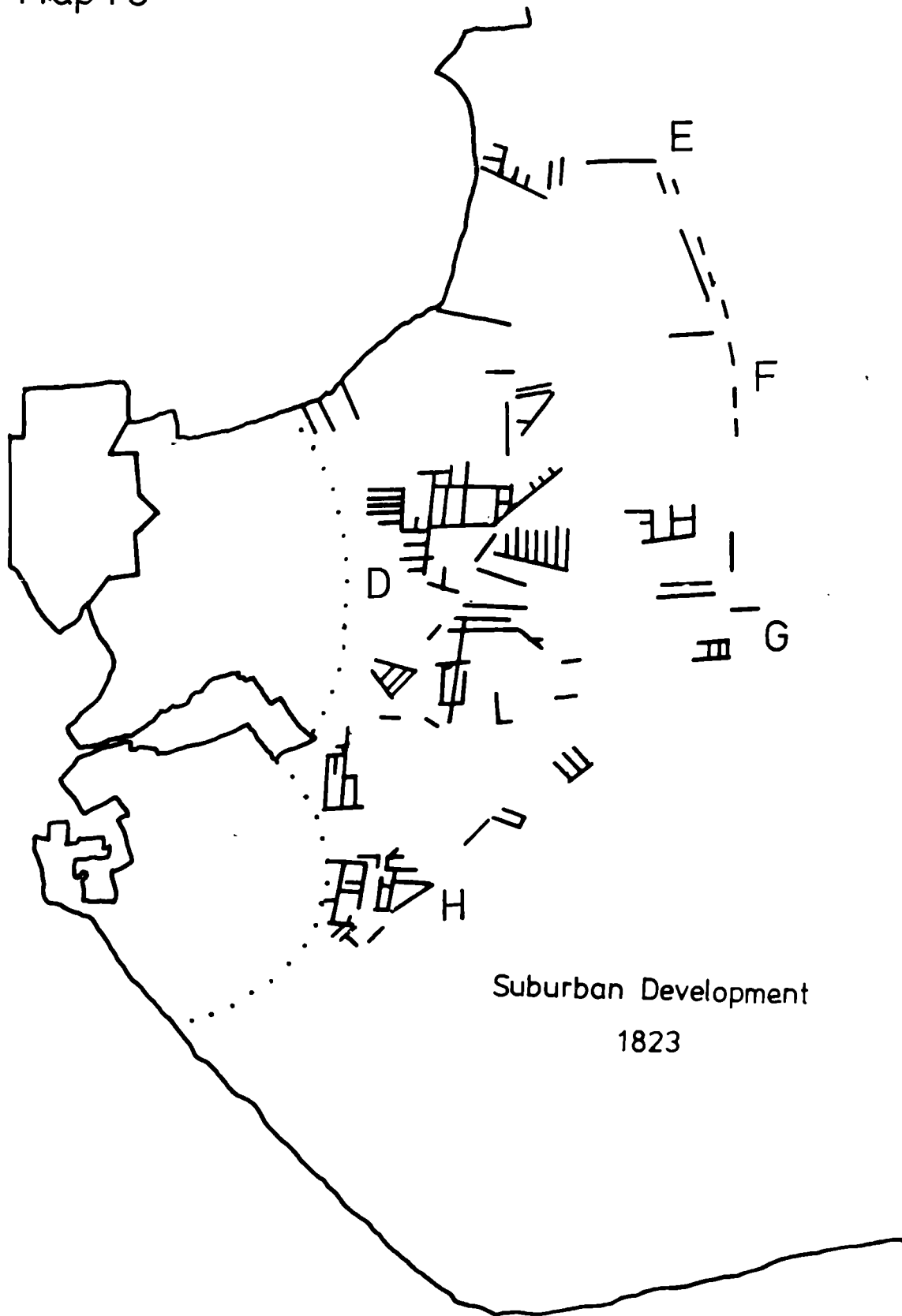
Map1-3



Map 1.4



Map 1.5



Eden's evidence that only a hundred more houses existed in 1797 than 1795 suggests that a lot of building must have taken place during the last few years of the eighteenth century, in order to have given the very high rate of growth between 1795 and 1801. We can reconcile the differences between our two sources by suggesting that the building of the late nineties took place in old streets and those established during the early years of the war. In fact, the rate-books show that over the period 1793 - 1815, the number of houses per street increased.

After 1801, building appears to have slackened, and there was a national decline in building until about 1806. C.W. Chalkin has noted a high level of speculative building in Portsea between 1806 and 1816 and it would seem sensible to assume that the increased rate of building for 1811 - 1820 was concentrated in the years up to the end of the war in 1815.¹ However, though one nineteenth century observer sought to explain the census figures in this way, his enquiries led him to believe that there had been considerable building since the end of the war.² The extent of peacetime construction work can be gauged by comparing Map 1.5, showing streets existing in 1823, with Map 1.4, for 1815. In the main, by 1823 the new and old suburban areas merged and expanded.

In summary we can say that the early years of the war saw an expansion of the areas of housing. In particular Croxton Town, which was to become Southsea, was established. For the rest of the decade there was a rapid development in established areas, but the years 1801 - 1806 saw a slower rate of growth. This period includes several peace years. After 1806, building activity became greater. In 1808

¹ C.W. Chalkin Provincial Towns of Georgian England (1974)

² Howard papers op.cit.

the local newspaper reported:

"The extensive buildings that are carrying on in the suburbs of this town, can not fail to strike even the casual observer, and they bid fair in a short time of becoming a handsome regular and very populous place - There have been built, and are now building, between the morass and the road that leads into Portsmouth from London, one hundred and four houses in the short period of one year; and within another twelvemonth, it is expected that the range of buildings from Southsea Common will be joined to the Halfway Houses by the Wiltshire Lamb, which will then rival in point of size and extent, either of the Towns within the garrison."¹

The momentum of urban expansion built up between 1806 and 1815 was so great that it continued into the post-war period, despite evidence of a slowing of population growth and a reduction of employment.

Generally, we may note that the relationship between population and housing is complex. The fastest decades for population growth in Portsmouth in the early nineteenth century was 1801-11. The largest rate of housing expansion took place 1811-21. This may reflect a switching of resources from war-related activity such as contracting, to house building. However, the rapid expansion of the population of the suburban areas 1811-21 must be related to the extensive building in those areas (see Table 1.4).

Living Conditions and Health

How urban growth affected living conditions in Portsmouth is difficult to assess. Contemporary accounts are brief and contradictory. Some represented the area:

"...as a sickly damp aguish and altogether unwholesome spot, where as to the contrary its inhabitants are living proofs that it is unexceptionably one of the healthiest towns in England."²

¹ Hants. Tel. July 1808

² A Portsmouth Guide (1793)

Other inhabitants echoed this. Indeed, De Gomme's maps show that in the late seventeenth century, Portsmouth had a pleasant prospect. Later, in the eighteenth century, Defoe remarked favourably on the area. However, in the middle of the eighteenth century Rennie, the engineer, was harsher, saying of Portsmouth and Portsea:

"As towns they are scarcely worthy of remark, being composed for the most part of dirty irregular streets."¹

There is, in fact, good reason to suspect that the area was not as healthy as locals suggested.

The main problem, appears to have been water. There were many small ponds and large areas of marsh subject to flooding. The slight natural drainage was further disrupted by the erection of military works and the construction of moats. The result was probably a malaria-prone neighbourhood. Hillsea barracks were dreaded as a fever trap.² In contrast there was difficulty finding urban water supplies. Agriculture was adequately supplied by springs; but in the towns, wells had to be sunk. As these were only shallow, they were at best irregular, merely collecting surface water percolating through the gravel. The rate books indicate that there were also a number of deeper wells worked by pumps. In particular, the town's breweries appear to have obtained water in this way. A supplementary supply, for general use, was provided by catching rain in tanks, apparently a common domestic feature of the district. The main source of water for most of the town's inhabitants was the water cart.

¹ J. Rennie op.cit.

² J.R. Western The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century London (1965).

"The water was carried over the towns in large barrels on a kind of cart with two wheels and a quantity of buckets slung behind, drawn by one horse. The noise of the watercarts, the jingling of their buckets and the insolence of the vendors was proverbial."¹

This system worked adequately as a source of water until a supply was piped in 1811. But, as described by another writer, the new water companies provided only poor quality water for which there was little demand.² In 1812 a local newspaper suggested that the new supply of water should be used to cleanse Portsea's streets which were narrow and filled with filth.³ Hired scavengers were supposed to keep the streets clean and remove night soil. As manure (for the adjacent agricultural lands), dirt and excrement had a commercial value, they were piled up in the town before sale.

Another threat to the health of the Portsmouth area was the presence of many thousands of prisoners in the locality, many of whom were housed in hulks moored in the harbour. The occasional influx of large bodies of soldiers and seamen from abroad presented a similar risk.

It is difficult to determine whether or not the rapid expansion described above led to a deterioration in conditions. The best that can be done is to put forward figures for the average population per house.⁴

¹ Henry Slight. The Supply of Water (Portsmouth 1850)
Robert Rawlinson. Report to the General Board of Health on the Sewage, Drainage and Water Supply of Portsmouth (1850)

² M. Hallet op cit pp 10, 13.

³ Hants. Co. 20.1.1812.

⁴ Pp 1801 (140) VI 813 op cit
Pp 1812 (310) (317) XI op cit
Pp 1822 (502) XV op cit

Table 1.2

Average Population per house in Portsea and Portsmouth.

Year	1801	1811	1821
Portsmouth	6.9	6.51	6.07
Portsea	5.74	5.71	4.76

For the sake of comparison similar figures have been calculated for four other towns.

Table 1.3

Average Population per house in Southampton, Winchester, Manchester and Liverpool.

Year	1801	1811	1821
Southampton	5.2	5.8	6.2
Winchester	7.2	5.9	6.2
Manchester	6.8	5.8	5.5
Liverpool	6.7	6.1	5.4

As far as this evidence goes, it suggests that the ratio between housing and population in Portsmouth improved. The combination of post-war suburban development and a slower rate of population growth made for a marked improvement in density of housing in Portsea between 1811 and 1821. However, we must not place too much weight on evidence relating to the density of housing. Though the average population per house for Portsmouth was 6.51 in 1811, the local press reported that in one house 14 families consisting of 75 people in all had been counted

in the census.¹ Portsmouth's fairly high population housing ratio relative to Portsea's may be a reflection of the numbers of servants working in the houses of gentlemen and officers, and in the town's inns.

Whether or not the development of suburbs eased any possible danger of overcrowding would have depended on the services that were provided for the new areas and the nature of the housing that was built. General Bentham, the Inspector General of Naval Works, made a general accusation against the speculators who were exploiting the Dock Yard workers' need for habitations. He claimed that builders had constructed houses in areas in which they

"... crowded them together, regardless of the discomfort of the inhabitants and of the injurious effects on health, of the want of cleanliness and air, where by fevers and other contagious disorders, are as frequent and fatal in the neighbourhood of Naval Arsenals as in the most crowded and unhealthy parts of the Metropolis."²

C.W. Chalklin has noted the speculative nature of building in Portsea: small plots, cheap houses and narrow streets.³ A newspaper complained of new houses being built of old ships timbers and used bricks.⁴ Even so, not all the new housing was built by speculators. There is a little evidence to indicate that Dock Yard workers built houses for themselves. But, as land prices spiralled, this sort of development must have become difficult, though building plots continued to be subdivided for sale as sites for individual houses. It is possible

¹ Hants. Tel. 17.6.1811.

² Samuel Bentham. Desiderata on a Naval Arsenal (1814)

³ C.W. Chalklin op.cit.
C.W. Chalklin & M.A. Havinden (eds.) Rural Change and Urban Growth
(1974) pp 229 - 251.

⁴ Hants. Co. 13, 10, 1814.

that the Yard workers built better houses than the speculators, but it is possible that they did not and that they were also building for profit.

The critical problems of water supply and sanitation have been pointed out. These were probably not overcome by urban development beyond the areas covered by the Improvement Acts. Even as genteel a place as Southsea, already attracting visiting seabathers, was said to be set with "nuisances" which included pigs in the street. On balance, however, the slackening in the number of burials around 1808, may indicate that the dispersal of the population over a wider area may have had short term benefits.¹

Portsmouth does not seem to have been a worse place at the end of the eighteenth century than many other large towns. If anything, the artisan area of Portsea was more crowded and dirtier than its neighbour. Over the area as a whole, suburban development and piped water may have made life a little more pleasant, even if they did not have any fundamental effect on living conditions.

¹ See below p. 41

Population.

A sketch of Portsmouth's demography helps to place such problems as crime and poverty in a more general context.¹ The material available for use in measuring Portsmouth's population comes mainly from the parish register abstract and the official censuses of 1801, 1811 and 1821.² Our study of housing makes it clear that the war caused a rapid growth of the town which it is not unreasonable to assume was due to migration.

Unfortunately, our period opens nearly ten years before the first census, so that at best only an estimate can be made of the population of 1791. We have tried to provide such a figure by subtracting the surplus of births over deaths for the decade 1791 - 1801 from the 1801 census figure. However, the estimate thus derived was thought to be too unreliable for use.³

¹ The demographic questions a historian may ask are listed in D.E.C. Eversley Population, Economy and Society in History, Ed. D.V. Glass & D.E.C. Eversley (1965) p.25.

² P.P. 1801 (140) V 813, 1801-02(9)(112) VI VII
Abstract of Answers and Returns pursuant to Act 41 Geo.3 for taking an account of the population of Great Britain in 1801.
P.P. 1812 (316)(317) XI Abstract of Answers and Returns pursuant to Act 51, Geo.3 for taking an account of the population of Great Britain in 1811.
P.P. 1821 (502) XV Abstract of Answers and Returns pursuant to Act 1, Geo.4 for taking an Account of the population of Great Britain in 1821.

³ The main reason for being suspicious of a population figure estimated in this way is that, besides ignoring Non-Conformists, it takes no account of the dramatic change that we think took place in the structure of Portsmouth's population. War brought many young and unmarried or unaccompanied people to the area. Moreover, it also brought families with young children (see P.C.R.O. 11A/20/89 for a pathetic account of such a family). The only way that an accurate picture of Portsmouth's population might be drawn is through the laborious process of family reconstitution.

It is suggested that between 1793 and the end of the Napoleonic wars Portsmouth's population grew very rapidly. That growth, however, was not due to a single cause nor was it at an even rate. Basically, the years of the Revolutionary Wars, ending in 1802, saw the area's population being swollen by rapid migration. The next decade or so witnessed a gradual easing of inward migration but greater natural growth, which continued after the war when 'mechanical' factors were tending to reduce the population. A more exact description and chronology of this process is impossible because of the inadequacy of the data we have used, but more sophisticated demographic work might produce an interesting analysis of a community greatly affected by war. The most important point to bear in mind as far as this general study is concerned is that there is reason to believe that much of Portsmouth's wartime population was made up of adult immigrants, in particular large numbers of women.

Employment in the arsenals of Portsmouth was one of the major attractions of the area. Saxton, writing in 1794, testified as to the rural origins of the new workmen,

"... those men we now secure are only County Lads and Labourers who come into us for the moment purely to avoid the balloting and Augmentation of the Militia" ... (Saxton said that,) "... few ... have ever seen a ship before", (and that they were) "... men of no responsibility what so ever and not proof even against a pot of Beer."¹

Saxton's comments were supported by agriculturalists in Hampshire who complained;

"Portsmouth and the shipyards of the coast, afford a constant market for all the prime and picked labourers of the county leaving little behind but feebleness and debility to carry forward the common labours of the county."²

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/21 2.9.1794; 8.9.1794.

² Board of Agriculture. General View of the Agriculture of the County of Hampshire. (1805) p.384.

It is to be expected that many of those who migrated to Portsmouth to find work were males in their early twenties moving in the short stages described by Redford. Even so there were several other types of migrant.¹ First, there were Yard employees with skills needed by the Navy. As apprenticeships lasted until at least the age of twenty-one it might be expected that on the whole skilled workers were older than the labourers who migrated. The Dock Yard records indicate that some of the artisans who came to Portsmouth to work for the Navy had families.² The same source also shows that the Navy recruited craftsmen through the impress service from as far away as Leith. Metal workers were drawn from the Midlands.³ The attraction of working in the Yard was constant employment during the war and protection from impressment in the Navy or enlistment in the Militia. Similar conditions caused seamen to enter the Transport service.⁴

Besides these voluntary migrants, Portsmouth also contained many thousands of men in the armed services. The operation of the press also brought men to the town who had been discharged as unfit for service. As army and navy personnel were not included in local census returns they represent a major omission from the population counts. The ^{impact} ~~effect~~ of servicemen on the population is difficult to gauge. In 1809 nearly 8,000 soldiers were listed in the area, but many were merely transients.⁵ In 1811 it was claimed that 28,000 militiamen had passed through Hilsea barracks.

¹ A. Redford. Labour Migration in England (1926).

² N.M.M. POR/A/47. 7.8.1804.

³ N.M.M. POR/C/26 17.9.1811.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/F/21. 2.9.1794.

⁵ PRO. Wo. 17 864.

With the servicemen came large numbers of women and children. A figure for service families is impossible to find. In at least one census, 1811, women and children living in barracks were like their menfolk, not counted.¹ It was also noted that:

"The number of sailors' marriages at Portsmouth is considerable and accounts for the fluctuation as well as the large proportion of marriages."²

Clearly the demographic effect of the presence of large numbers of servicemen in Portsmouth was important but impossible to measure. Many sailors, virtual prisoners on their vessels, must have found it difficult to form lasting alliances with women and to support families. Many temporary couples probably did without the formality of a marriage service, and bigamous marriages must have been frequent.

Laying aside the doubts we have about the adequacy of the materials, we can say something of the rates of growth of Portsmouth during the early nineteenth century. Table 1.4 summarises the census enumerations of 1801, 1811 and 1821. For the area as a whole these figures represent an annual rate of growth for the period 1801-1811 of approximately 2% and of 1.2% for the years 1811-1821. These local rates can be compared with the national rates for the same periods. In the first decade the total population for England and Wales grew by 1.3% per annum. During the second decade when growth was the fastest recorded, the rate was 1.5%.³ This comparison points to several

1 B.M. ADO. Mss. 4001 Howard Papers.

2 P.P. 1822 (502) XV.

3 Pop. in Hist. op cit p.354. T.H. Marshall 'The Population problem During the Industrial Revolution'. This characterization of the second decade has been challenged by the suggestion that it was a period of only average growth. See J.T. Krause 'Changes in English Fertility and Mortality 1781-1850.' Econ. Hist. Rev. XI (1958-9)p52.

conclusions. The decade 1801-1811 was, for Portsmouth, one of very great expansion well above the national average even for the following ten years. In fact, the rate of expansion may have been even greater than the census indicates. In 1811 the local newspaper believed that the population and housing of Portsmouth parish had been under-enumerated.¹ Expansion, however, was cut back during 1811-1821 well below the national rate. The cessation of hostilities provides the simplest explanation for this. It may be postulated that there was a greater rate of growth for the years 1811-1815 than for the decade as a whole. Indeed in 1821 the census noted about Portsea: "This Parish is supposed to contain fewer inhabitants than at the end of the war though more than in 1811."² Thus the abnormally low rate of growth for the whole decade probably disguises a net loss of population between 1815 and 1821. Besides differences in rates of growth over time, it is clear that there were differences between areas. Basically the old urban areas of Portsmouth and Portsea Town, confined by their walls, grew much less rapidly than the suburban and rural areas of the Liberty and the Guildable. The rapid suburban development in the latter part of the first decade of the nineteenth century has already been noted, though, as we remarked, the relationship between population and housing is not a simple one.

It is usually said that a local expansion of industrial employment causes a marked migration of young males. On the other hand, it has been noted that ports, as trading centres, attracted young women. Portsmouth provides an interesting third pattern in as much as it filled

¹ Hants. Co. 15.6.1811. However, no support for this belief was published.

² P.P. 1822 (502) XV op cit.

Diagram 1-1

Population Age and Sex Structure 1821

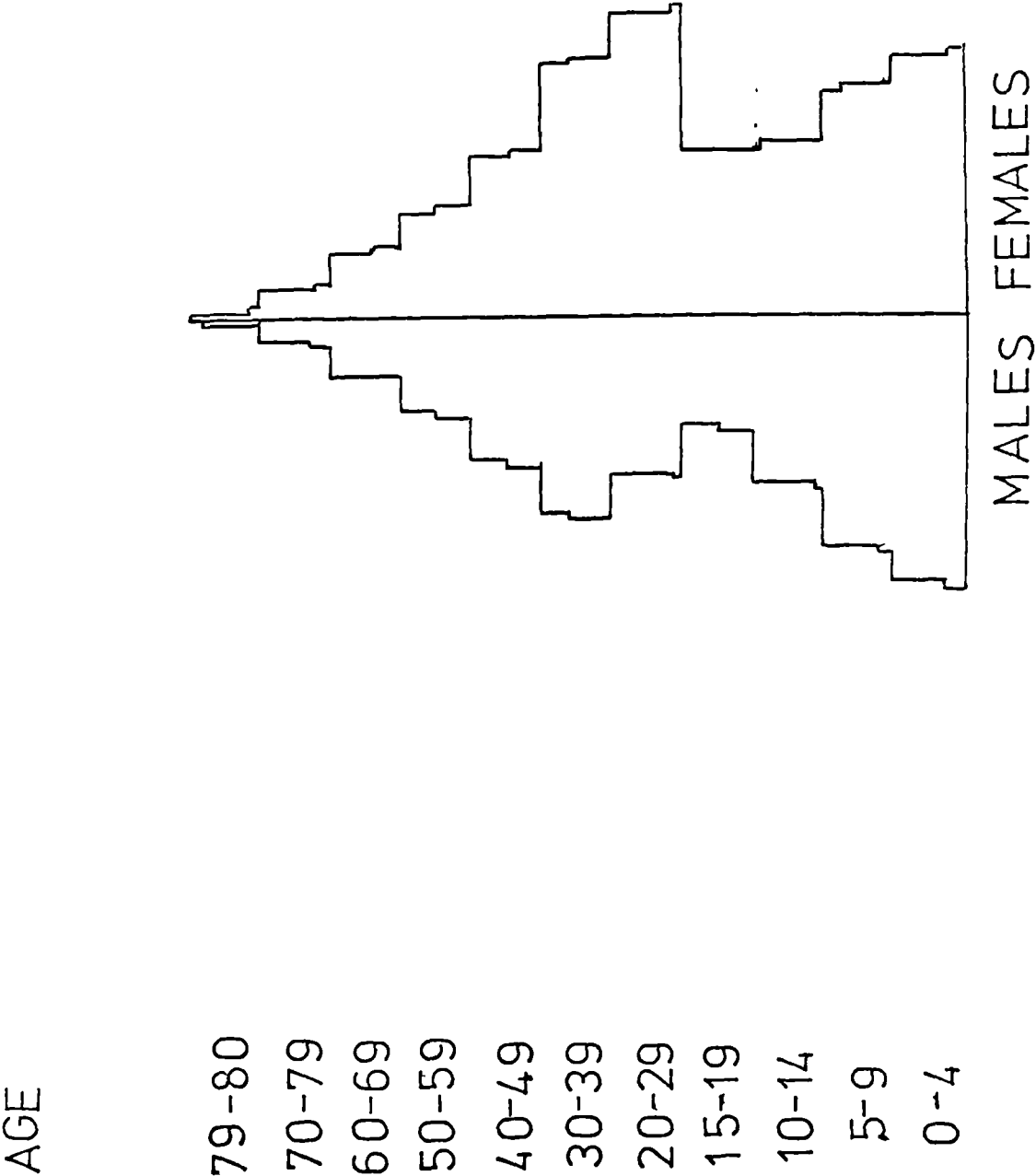


Table 1.4 The Population of Portsmouth as described
in the census.

	1801	1811	1	1821	2
Portsmouth Town & Parish	7,839	7,103	-9.4	7,269	+12.28
Portsea Town	14,943	16,166	+8.2	14,223	-12.5
Portsea Liberty	9,384	15,199	+62.4	20,562	+35.4
Portsea Guildable	1,060	2,099	+98.0	3,594	+41.6
Portsea Total	25,387	33,464	+27.9	38,379	+14.7
Total for the Borough and the Guildable	33,226	40,567	21.9	45,648	12.3

Columns 1 and 2 - Percentage Change.

Table 1.5

Age Structure 1821

	Age Group	Males No.	% of Total Male Population	Females No.	% of Total Female Population	% of Total Population
1816-20	0-4	3732	8.17	3722	8.15	16.32
1811-15	5-9	3217	7.1	3274	7.17	14.27
1806-10	10-14	2314	5.05	2588	5.67	10.72
1801-05	15-19	1555	3.41	2394	5.26	8.67
1800-1791	20-29	2215	4.89	4308	9.45	14.34
1790-81	30-39	2765	6.1	3562	7.8	13.9
1780-71	40-49	2061	4.52	2338	5.1	9.62
1770-61	50-59	1352	2.96	1552	3.4	6.36
1760-51	60-69	797		937		
1750-41	70-79	330		422		
1740-31	80-89	78		115		
1730-21	90-100	8		11		
1720	+100	1				

Table 1.6 The Numbers of Male and Female
Baptisms 1781 - 1820.

		Males		Females	
1820-16	0-4	4312		3901	8213
			} 9305		} 18109
1815-11	5-9	4993		4903	9896
1810-06	10-14	4116		3714	7830
			} 7490		} 14421
1805-01	15-19	3374		3217	6591
1800-1791	20-29	6193		5553	11746
1790-81	30-39	4277		4427	8704

both functions. Besides the men who came to work in the Yard and to serve in the army and navy many women also came, mainly in the wake of the latter.

However, it is virtually impossible to quantify the sexual imbalance in the population. It was not abnormal for an urban population to have a preponderance of females; more male children might be born but their chances of survival beyond infancy were less than females. In addition, we have noted that part of Portsmouth's male population, servicemen, did not appear in the census statistics. These points aside, approximately 55% of the enumerated population of the town were, in 1801, females. The national figure, based on data that also excludes servicemen, is about 52%. It is difficult to say whether such a small difference is of any great importance, especially as there is no information about the age structure.¹ As the proportion of women of all ages in the population varies little in any of the three census years we are concerned with, this last problem may be overcome by using the age returns which were made for the first time in 1821. (Table 1.5 and Diagram 1.1).

If the age structure categories used in 1821 are rearranged into uniform intervals of ten years, it is possible to compare the numbers in each group with the number of baptisms in each appropriate decade (Table 1.6). In a closed population it might reasonably be expected that the number of baptised in any decade would be more than the number in the matching ten year age group and that the number in each cohort would decline with age. Any significant deviation from this pattern or abnormality in the size of change between the number in

¹ A similar imbalance has been noticed in the population of another garrison town, Winchester. See L.F.C. Pach. A Study of the Methods of Poor Relief in the Winchester Area. 1720-1845 (Southampton Univ. M.A. Thesis 1967). A 15% excess of females over males was noted as late as 1853 and ascribed to Portsmouth's role as a naval base. See J. Fincham A Statistical Account of the Isle of Portsea. Royal Statistical Society Journal 16 (1853) p226.

each group should alert us to the fact that the population is not a closed one. We may also be able to infer something about the cause and nature of the openness; that is we will learn something about migration.

Table 1.7 showing the number of people alive in 1821 in certain age groups, expressed as a percentage of the number of baptisms in the appropriate years, was derived from Table 1.5 and 1.6.

Table 1.7

<u>Date of Baptism</u>	<u>Age in 1821</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>All</u>
1820-1811	0-9	74.5%	79.0%	77%
1810-1801	10-19	51.5%	72.0%	63.0%
1800-1791	20-29	35.5%	77.0%	57.0%
1790-1781	30-39	65.5%	80.0%	72.0%

Several features of this table are of interest. First, we can note that, despite our expectations, a high proportion of those born between 1790 and 1781, that is the oldest age group in the table, were still surviving in 1821. Second, the figures for women are generally high and display a very small range. The simplest explanation for the pattern of these figures is migration.

To be more specific, if we take the males, the eldest group (30 - 39 years old) would have entered the labour force shortly after the outbreak of war and would have known ten to twenty years of good employment. Conversely, they would also be the group most depleted by the ravages of military service. Thus, it is very striking indeed that this group is 30% larger than the next group and even 14% larger than the 10 - 19 year olds. Either there had been a remarkable change in

the age-specific incidence of death, or a significant level of migration had taken place. What seems likely is that the numbers of 30 - 39 year olds had been expanded by wartime immigration of Yard workers and demobilised servicemen and that the 20 - 29 year old age group was depleted by post-war migration away from the area.

The contrast in the data for males and females may be explained in a number of ways. Greater female longevity and better enumeration among women would partially explain both the size and small range of the figures for them. For instance, mortality arising from hostilities would not have any great effect on females. Further, women may have moved to Portsmouth at an earlier age than men, when their physical charm was greatest and may have been less likely to move away when they were older.

Unfortunately it is not possible to be more precise about the level and nature of migration in Portsmouth. All we can do is to suggest that migration was important and that it had a particular effect in attracting young men in search of employment, and women who were either alone or accompanied their men-folk with their families. Women we feel were especially important in Portsmouth's migrant population and this is reflected in the problem females posed in the context of poverty and crime. Even so, the operation of charities and the Poor and Settlement laws probably made for emigration from the area even in war-time, ensuring that the migrant sector of the population was ever changing in composition and fluctuating in size.¹

¹ See below p.93

After the uncertainties of estimating the structure of the population, it is a relief to pass on to the relative security of describing the pattern of Portsmouth's natural growth as shown in the Parish registers (Graph 1.1).

The overall upward trend of baptisms, burials and marriages throughout the war is clear; yet the sharp decline coinciding with the end of the war may be the result of a decrease in the level of registration. The end of the war was not as catastrophic as these figures might suggest. It has been noted elsewhere that demobilisation in Portsmouth was spread over two or three years.¹ It is also strange that if these figures were correct there was no post-war baby boom, as there was after the end of the American Revolution.

During the seventeen nineties, the curve for baptisms rises jaggedly but continuously, each low point being higher than the last. The origin of this pattern may lie in the partial mobilisation which accompanied *the crisis in relations between Britain and Russia in* 1790 - 1791. The numbers of men in the navy rose from 18,000 in 1789 to 20,000 in 1790 and nearly 39,000 in 1791. In 1792 the number fell to 16,613 only to rocket to about 70,000 the following year.²

Baptisms in Portsmouth show little sensitivity to general economic conditions. For instance there is little evidence in these figures of the food crisis of the mid-nineties, or of the financial stresses of a few years later. Clearly, local influences overrode national movements.

The yearly number of recorded burials provides a smooth upward curve which in the years 1794, '95 and '96 actually overtakes baptisms. The series then exhibits some fluctuations and an overall decline.

¹ See p. 113

² C. Lloyd. The British Seaman (1968) p.263.

This is probably explicable in terms of the preceding famine years during which the weakest would have been killed. The peak in 1800 also reflects a critical price year.

Perhaps of all vital events, marriages are the most controllable and thus the most responsive to social circumstances. Marriages rose sharply and steadily throughout the decade from 1793 and this is probably the force behind the general upward trend of baptism. It is noteworthy that marriages reach a peak a year before baptisms, indicating that the latter were the result of the fruits of new marriages. One would expect about a year to elapse between marriage and the birth of the first child. The rise in the number of marriages warrants further consideration. A clear implication of an increased marriage rate is that there were a greater number of males and females of marital age and status in the population. In Portsmouth, this could be the result of an earlier "baby boom" some twenty to twenty-five years previous, during the War for American Independence (1775 - 1783) and immediately after. Alternatively there could ^{have been} ~~be~~ many young migrants in Portsmouth during the French wars.

1800 stands out as a year in which population trends, as reflected by registration statistics, changed. Marriages decline for the first time in seven years, baptisms reach a peak before three years of decline and deaths show the same pattern. It would seem that much of the pressure making for nearly ten years of expansion was exhausted by 1801. This was probably due to the accumulated effects of food shortages and inflation, reinforced by the short peace during part of 1802 and 1803. Demobilisation was rapid, the navy was more than halved and nearly a thousand men were discharged from the Dock Yard.¹

¹ See below p.92

in 1802,
 The jump in marriages, was likely to have been the result of demobbed sailors and soldiers taking wives. Most of these couples might be expected to have dispersed by the next year. A similar leap can be seen at the end of the American War but not so definitely in 1814 or 1815, which again raises a doubt about the adequacy of registration.

With the renewal of war all three series begin to move upwards again and keep roughly in unison until 1841 when marriages and baptisms continue to rise but burials falter. Why this is so, is difficult to explain. Though the figures show a rise towards 1811 and then fall again, one might have expected that the food crisis of 1811-12 would have been more clearly marked. There is little other evidence to suggest that Portsmouth experienced severe hardship at this time, even though prices did rise.

The marriage curve poses a similar problem, for its rise halts in 1811. If the effect of the end of the war could be discounted, marriages exhibit a decline continuing until 1819. This is all the more perplexing as baptisms continue almost unchecked until 1815. There could be many reasons for this. First it could be that between 1811 and 1815 a greater number of children were being born to established couples or to couples unrecorded in the marriage figures. This in turn could arise from a decline in the standard of registering marriages, the immigration of expanding families or a rise in the number of unsolemnised marriages. Alternatively there could be an increase in the bastardy rate and an improvement of the registering of illegitimate children. However, there is no way of verifying any of these suggestions.

Perhaps the movement of the statistics for baptisms, deaths and marriages can be explained by suggesting that about 1810 the manpower

needs of the army and military were satisfied and that the "mechanical" cause of population growth in Portsmouth became weaker. Nevertheless, nearly twenty years of war had created a level of general prosperity in Portsmouth which enabled natural growth to continue to accelerate. That even the cessation of hostilities did not have quite the dramatic effect that the figures for the rate of population growth suggest has already been postulated. An analysis of the 1841 and 1851 census reports might indicate how many of Portsmouth's wartime immigrants remained in the town.

The Economy.

In a later chapter the Dock Yard will be examined in detail. Here it is intended to describe some of the features of Portsmouth's economic activity carried on outside the Yard. To do full justice to the civilian economy of a town of thirty thousand ^{people} is not possible in this context. However, the Dock Yard must be put into a wider picture of employment so as to determine whether there was an alternative economic base for a community as large as the one that existed.

Agriculture.

Most agricultural land on Portsea island was probably given over to arable farming, but it is difficult to be definite about this. Several large farms practised rotations involving: cereals, vetches, peas, turnips, clover and manuring with refuse from the town.¹ As there was only one team of ploughing oxen on the island it seems likely that the main crops were vegetables and fruits for sale in the local

¹ P.C.R.O. 3/2 A lease 1787. 3/3/a-b A lease 1808.

market. What pasture that did exist, including the grassed slopes of the defences, was given over to fattening cattle.¹ Hay and straw were also produced locally. The combined demand of the armed services and the town must have created a large market for meat. Prisoners of war at Porchester alone consumed over a hundred head of cattle a week.² The town's graziers and butchers probably imported cattle on the hoof and fattened them before slaughtering. Slaughter houses occur in the rate books almost as frequently as bakeries. In all it could be said:

"The markets are plentifully supplied with good butcher's meat poultry of all sorts, fish, eggs, butter, bacon, etc. and remarkably large quantities of the best vegetables which no town in England can boast superior."³

However, only part of the markets supplies were produced locally and Portsmouth had well established trade relations with its hinterland:

"This Town has a very great connection with the adjacent county and forms the centre of a very extensive circle drawing its supplies from a considerable distance."⁴

Livestock, cereals and dairy produce were probably the main imports. Hampshire was a fertile and growing source of supply. William Cobbett wrote of the southern slopes of Portsdown Hill:

"It is impossible that there can be anywhere, a better corn country than this ... The land is excellent. The situation is good for manure. The spot the earliest in the whole Kingdom... No beans here no Peas Scarcely any oates. Wheat, Barley and turnips."⁵

Part of this area was also used for large scale cattle fattening.⁶

Possibly Portsmouth was in the best position to monopolise this adjacent granary, but generally the town was in competition with London

¹ A Portsmouth Guide (C 1800)
The History of Portsmouth (C 1806)

² Hants. Tel. 28.5.1813.

³ A Portsmouth Guide op.cit.

⁴ The Ancient and Modern History of Portsmouth (C 1796-1806)

⁵ W. Cobbett Rural Rides (1967 ed.) pp 130-31.

⁶ Hants R II (1799)p153

for Hampshire's expanding agricultural output.¹ Also, demand for foodstuffs came from the Navy, which in times of shortage created problems.² During peace or abnormal war-time circumstances, foodstuffs of all kinds could be imported from the Continent.

The Port

Economically, Portsmouth depended on the sea for its existence. Besides the naval facilities, there was, in the Camber, a civilian dock. Using material from the Customs' letter books, it is possible to say something about the area's civilian maritime economy.

Table 1.8 records the major part of Portsmouth's overseas trade, excluding naval transports, for the years 1792 and 1795, one year being before the outbreak of war, the other after it. The first point to notice is that, in terms of tonnage, Portsmouth had a severe imbalance of trade with an excess of imports greater than 80% of exports. In itself, this does not mean an unbalanced payments situation. The exports could have been of high value and small bulk. However, in Portsmouth this would have been unlikely because there was no market for such goods. It would therefore appear that many more vessels put into Portsmouth from abroad than returned there and most probably left Portsmouth for other English ports to make up their cargoes. For instance many of the vessels bringing timber from America probably operated from Liverpool.

¹ J.M. Beattie. The pattern of Crime in England 1660-1800. Past and present 62 (1974) p.54.

E.L. Jones. Eighteenth Century Changes in Hampshire Chalkland Farming. Agricultural History Review VIII (1950) pp 5-20.

² See below p. 524

Table 1.8 Shipping involved in Portsmouth's Foreign Trade from a Customs return.

	1792				1795			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Norway	16	3339			19	3010		
Sweden	3	790			3	225	1	150
Poland	3	800			4	1313		
Russia	7	1821			36	10742		
Prussia	4	1076			5	874	1	418
France	76	2081	12	306	3	780		
Holland and Zealand	12	685	3	378				
Spain	4	749			11	1556	4	453
Portugal	6	709			4	513	4	394
Ireland	15	1060	3	133	20	1320		
Channel Islands	15	656	8	337	22	1795	4	546
America	1	755			8	2811	6	1239
West Indies			4	1765			1	398
East Indies					5	678		
Total	162	14521	30	2319	140	25617	21	3598

Column 1 Number of ships inward-bound
 " 2 Tonnage of ships inward-bound
 " 3 Number of ships outward-bound
 " 4 Tonnage of ships outward-bound

Table 1.9 The Number of ships involved in Portsmouth's Coastal Trade as returned by the Customs

	Arrivals Exclusive of Colliers	Departures Exclusive of Colliers	Colliers
1790	1178	348	171
91	1090	365	182
92	1052	500	162
93	1395	538	183
94	1681	590	213
95	1505	689	269
96			
97			
98			
99			
1800			
01			
02			
03			
04			
05	1872	1145	
06	2187	1185	
07	2362	1198	
08	2671	1204	
09	2619	1373	
10	2901	1742	
11	3198	1924	

Source: Customs 58/64/24

It is clear from the table, that, in peace, Scandinavia and the Baltic played the major part in Portsmouth's overseas trade. Next, in terms of tonnage came France, which in 1792 sent an unusually high number of vessels; then came Holland and the Iberian peninsula. After these places Ireland and the Channel Islands were important.

The outbreak of war curtailed trade with the continent without ending it altogether, but this was offset by a marked expansion of trade with the north and growth in dealings with America. Fewer ships came to Portsmouth but their average tonnage doubled. If we assume that most of the vessels from the Baltic were carrying timber, hemp, pitch and tar, it seems likely that most of Portsmouth's civilian seatriade was connected with the Dock Yard. The war-time development of trade with America was probably also related to imports of naval stores. The Baltic commerce involved the largest ships; the peace time trade with France was conducted in vessels of under thirty tons on average, while ships from Norway were over two hundred tons. Much French trade appears to have been in food-stuffs, vegetables, poultry and probably wine.¹ In 1810 when Napoleon sought to earn English gold by relieving English famine, a large cargo of French grain was imported via Portsmouth.² Spain and Portugal appear to have supplied wine, a large demand for which must have existed in Portsmouth with its many inns and large population of service and government officers. Ireland probably sent many sorts of grain stuff.³

The only other feature of the maritime economy that is worth noting in this context is that a small number of vessels of about two

¹ Customs 58/41 40

² Customs 58/58 94, see also
Hants. Co. 14.5.1814
Hants. Co. 8.10.1814
Hants. Co. 14.11.1814

³ Customs 58/72/106.

hundred to three-hundred tons were cleared from Portsmouth for the Southern Whale Fishery though they did not, apparently, bring their oil back to Portsmouth.¹ Also, during the war, the East and West Indiamen collected at Spithead to form convoy and to embark and disembark mails and passengers.² At times even coasting vessels had to collect at Portsmouth for protection against privateers.

In terms of the number of vessels involved, the coastal trade kept the commercial docks busier than overseas commerce and was probably the most important part of the town's purely civilian maritime affairs. It is impossible to state precisely what this trade was concerned with. Likely enough, foodstuffs were important but the ^hwarfingers' account books show that every sort of commodity was commonly shipped coastwise.³ Large quantities of coal were landed and, at times, nearly three hundred colliers were engaged in this trade. However, much of this fuel was probably for the Dock Yard. Sometimes both the Yard and the town were seriously short of coal. A number of packet vessels sailed regularly from the port. The statistics for coastal trade are summarized in Table 1.9 and it is again clear that Portsmouth was subject to an unbalanced trade.

In addition to its commerce, Portsmouth also supported a small fishing fleet. Besides dredging for oysters, a fairly large number of local boats fished mackerel and about a dozen vessels went further afield for herring. In all, something over one hundred boats of various

1 Customs 58/52.

2 C.N. Parkinson. Trade in the Eastern Seas (1937).

3 PCRO Cf 13/1 Warfingers' Account Book 1799 - 1802.
 PCRO Cf 13/2 " " " 1803 - 1810.
 PCRO Cf 13/3 " " " 1811 - 1816.

sizes may have been involved in fishing, though some contemporaries claimed that the supply of fresh fish was scanty and the price was high.¹ An attempt was made by local gentry to improve the supply of fresh fish when, in June 1796, they set up a society to form a fishing company.² This act, the local newspaper claimed, led to a twenty percent reduction in prices. The company threatened to prosecute forestallers and regratters in the fish market.³ However, the company failed in early 1797 because it was unable to provide the full-time management that it required:

"... the instant it was made known that the Portsmouth and Portsea fishery was to be discontinued, the fishermen of this town had a day of rejoicing, guns firing, parading the streets with blue ribbons in their hats and colours flying on board their vessels."⁴

Clearly local fishermen did not welcome competition, but declining fish stocks may well have contributed to high prices and poor supplies.⁵

The development of Portsmouth as a civilian port met with considerable opposition from the Navy, who feared that the harbour would become overcrowded and that the moorings would be damaged. Similarly, the Dock Yard officials had reservations about the development of a canal across the island and about the laying of waterpipes which might disrupt land traffic to the yard and cause watering jetties to be built out into the harbour.⁶ Encroachments on to the harbour and mudlands were jealously

1 Universal Trade Directory op cit.
 Customs 58/49/55
 Customs 58/79 68
 PCRO CE 7 p.36 Letter Book. 1818 - 1857.
 PCRO CC 7/56 Proceedings of the Portsmouth and Portsea Fishery.
 Charles Vancouver A General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire (1810)
 p.49 Monthly Magazine 12 (1801) p.218.

2 Ports. G. 7.6.1796

3 Ports . G. 20.6.1796.

4 Ports G. 7.2.1797

5 Hants. R. II (1801) p.157

6 N.M.M. POR/D/31 11.4.1816 N.M.M. POR/F/30 3.6.1806
 N.M.M. POR/F/32 24.8.1813.

watched by the Navy, and led to legal disputes with local inhabitants and Portsmouth Corporation.¹

From the small amount of information collected, it seems clear that, apart from naval traffic, Portsmouth was a very busy port in wartime. It is equally apparent that most of this activity was related to the supply of stores to the Dock Yard. Portsmouth was a consuming port with little outward-bound trade to match its imports.

Industry and Trade

One reason why Portsmouth had so little to export was the lack of any industry that catered for anything but local needs.

Shipbuilding and allied occupations

Compared with the Dock Yard, Portsmouth's shipbuilding concerns were very small. In 1804 five builders employed only thirty-one men and apprentices.² The average size of vessels built between 1786 and 1814 was 38.5 tons, though one vessel was 250 tons.³ The firms may also have taken on repair work for the merchant vessels that put into the port.

Involved in catering for the merchantmen were a number of small ropeyards and ships' chandlers.⁴ Some local ropemakers contracted for the Navy, providing both rope and workmen. A clause in their contract, however, prevented firms from contracting with the Navy and supplying civilians at the same time. ~~This rule claimed to prevent the fraudulent~~

¹ Ps.Jl. 11.7.1803.

² P.C.R.O. Papers and Accounts relating to Naval Ships, Timber, etc. presented to the House of Commons.

³ Customs 58/72 pp.103-104.

⁴ Universal Trade Directory op.cit.

This rule aimed to prevent the fraudulent conversion of government stores for private sale.¹ The embezzlement of stores also involved ships' chandlers. In 1812 a new anchor smithy was opened which claimed to be able to produce anchors of any size on the same principle as that used in the Dock Yard.² As few anchors used by merchantmen would have been anything near as big as the largest made for the Navy the size of the civilian smithy did not have to be very large.

Local businessmen supplied the Dock Yard with a whole range of goods and services. The town's leading family, the Carters, had established their fortunes on brewing and timber for the Navy.³ At least one local timber yard was large enough to use a steam engine, though in general the timber trade does not appear to have been in local hands.⁴

Other Industries

Besides the Dock Yard, Portsmouth had other government institutions of an industrial nature. These were the Ordnance and Victualling Departments. At the beginning of the war, the Victualling Office had both a brewery and a bakery in Portsmouth employing about three hundred and fifty men, approximately: two hundred and twenty five labourers, eighty coopers, forty millers and bakers, four pairs of sawyers and the crews of several victualling hoys. By the end of the war the government brewery had been moved to Weevil and the establishment at Portsmouth bakery was only one hundred and forty five, most of them labourers.⁵

¹ Ports. G. 70.11.1801

² Hants. Co. 28.10.1812

³ P.R.O. ADM/49/34
See below p.62

⁴ Hants. Tel. 29.1.1815

⁵ PRO/ADM/113/, 233-239 Victualling Office Pay Lists 1793-1816.

The civil establishment of the Ordnance at Portsmouth was divided into several departments. At the Gun Wharf about sixty assorted craftsmen and fifty five labourers were employed. The powder magazine at Tipner and the Royal Laboratory employed another twenty seven labourers and the Engineers Department employed eighty skilled artisans and one hundred and twenty four labourers, a total Ordnance establishment of three hundred and forty six craftsmen and two hundred and six labourers.¹

Like the Dock Yard the Victualling Department, and possibly the Ordnance, contracted locally for goods and services. The Victualling Department regularly purchased large supplied of biscuits, flour, meat and fresh vegetables.² The Board of Ordnance with responsibility for fortifications, may have purchased materials, especially bricks; yet, until 1811, it was also making its own at Fort Cumberland.³ Both departments were extending their facilities during the war.⁴ For its building the Ordnance used convict labour and, for maintenance work, the Royal Artificers were employed.⁵

Government developments and urban expansion probably provided a large market for Portsmouth brickworks, shown on contemporary maps along the junction of the brickearths and gravel. Though some details of one works, also producing lime, are known, no information about the workforce or output is available. One local water company, constructing its works between 1808 and 1811 used over a million bricks at a cost of £3,700, and we may assume that most of these were locally produced.⁶

¹ PRO WO 54 512

² PRO ADM 112/95

³ NMM POR/D/29. 27.6.1811.

⁴ W.H.G. Gillow Notes on the History of the Ordnance in Portsmouth (Portsmouth City Library 1960).

⁵ W.J. Connolly The History of the Royal Corps of Miners and Sappers (1855)

⁶ Mary Hallet Portsmouth Water Supply 1800-1860 (Portsmouth Paper No.12, 1971.)

The establishment of two water companies must have been a stimulus to the local economy and an opportunity for the local gentry to invest capital in an area where such chances must have been few. Among the water companies' most important customers were a number of brewers. It is difficult to judge the size of these concerns but some of them were fairly large. A petition from the workers of one brewery contains 16 names. Several of the town's most influential families were involved in brewing.¹ However, much local beer was made on a small scale. In a trade directory for 1795, victuallers, that is beer retailers who did their own brewing, are the most numerous group. Unlicensed brewing and beer selling reached so serious a level that an association was formed to suppress it in 1803.² There is also evidence of illicit distilling.³

Most Portsmouth trades were carried on in small workshops and there is no evidence to suggest that any other extensive industry existed. Lacking sources of water power, Portsea Island had little to attract manufacturing on a large scale though the breweries and tanning were likely to have been fairly important. One tan yard alone consisted of one hundred and fifty pits, drying sheds, three cottages and half an acre of land.⁴ The salterns, which covered a large area of marshland and provided one of Portsmouth's few export commodities, probably involved little capital and provided few jobs.

¹ P.C.R.O. 54/A/21/4

² Ports. J. 21.3.1803

³ Ports. G. 25.1.1802.

⁴ Hants. Co. 19.2.1816

Consumption, not production, was the main feature of Portsmouth's economy. Dock Yard, Navy and Military personnel provided a ready market for a multitude of goods and services. After victuallers, the most numerous classes of tradesmen listed in the directory were: clothing sellers, grocers, butchers and bakers. A large demand for consumer goods probably attracted many journeymen of a variety of trades to the town. A fair part of this trade, however, may have been in the hands of some members of the town's Jewish community. One writer complained that the Jewish merchants:

"...Have so far availed themselves of such a favourable opportunity as to occupy houses and shops in the first style of mercantile consequence in the trades (of) shopmen, taylors, watchmaker, pawnbroker, trinket merchants. Whilst Christian artizans, who are not so wealthy, are obliged to content themselves with sheds, bulks or any similar place which can afford them a chance of supporting themselves by a traffic limited in proportion to the small extent of their little capitals."¹

There is no doubt that the Jewish community was well established in Portsmouth and there may be some substance to the anonymous complaint that its members dominated trade; but the writer's comments indicate that there must also have been quite a large number of marginal enterprises of little capital whose fortunes probably ebbed and flowed with conditions in the town.

As Navy Agents, many members of the Jewish community were also deeply involved in another aspect of the town's economy, the discounting of seamen's pay tickets. Nearly fifty Jewish Navy Agents have been listed in Portsmouth.² Another aspect of the town's financial system was its two banks. The importance of these institutions was shown in 1801 when the local newspaper reported:

¹ The History of Portsmouth (C.1800)

² Cecil Roth The Portsmouth Community and its Historical Background Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society XIII (1936) pp 157-187.

"For a few days past this town and neighbourhood has been very violently agitated owing to a most gross malevolent and ill grounded report tending to injure the established credit of the two Portsmouth Banks. A handbill was immediately issued signed by almost every respectable person in the three towns, (ie Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport) specifying their reliance on the two Houses and their determination to negotiate their notes."¹

Besides the everyday trading facilities, Portsmouth had an annual fair for two weeks in July.² Like many similar affairs this one had lost many of its original commercial functions and had degenerated into a collection of sideshows and trinket stalls. However, the fair on Southdown Hill which followed immediately upon Portsmouth Fair still retained an agricultural atmosphere with the sale of cheeses and cattle. War revived both fairs.³

Employment

It is impossible to assess with any accuracy how many people were employed in civilian occupations in Portsmouth or what percentage of the labour force was male or female. One estimate for 1821, is that thirty six percent of the male labour force was employed in the Dock Yard alone, which leaves sixty four percent of the men and all of the females to be employed in civilian concerns.⁴ If the 1821 age structure is used with the population figures for 1801 to indicate the size of the male working population, it is possible to estimate that something like thirty percent of the male labour force of the town was working in the Yard. If another thousand jobs are allowed for in the Victualling, Ordnance and other

¹ Ports. G. 26.11.1801

² Ports Tel. 13.7.1801

³ Ports G. 15.7.1793
Hants. Co. 4.8.1810

⁴ Mary Hallet op.cit. p.17.

Government departments then about sixty percent of the male labour force was available for civilian employment.¹

Brewing, brickmaking and agriculture provided employment for a considerable number of people. Market gardening in the area was probably labour intensive, and with brickmaking, may have provided some employment for women. However, we have no evidence on most of these points. All we can do is note that the very general breakdown of occupations given in the 1801 census lists 368 people as being employed in agriculture, i.e. about 0.5% of the estimated male work force, and that 4,400 are listed as being employed in handicrafts, trades and manufactures.² If this latter figure excludes the Yard workers, who would total about half that number, then about 62% of the male labour force would be accounted for. In fact the figure for total civilian employment would also have to take account of women, and the employment provided by the transport industry, clerical work and domestic service. It is impossible to estimate the numbers working in these occupations, but it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that with so many service and government officers in the area and the town's many inns, public houses and victuallers, there were considerable opportunities, especially for women, for domestic servants. Much of the employment provided by Portsmouth's civilian industries, such as they were, was likely to have been of a seasonal nature and was probably at its fullest during summer when harvesting drew people out of the town.³

In all it would seem that most employment and economic activity in Portsmouth was closely related to the work of Government institutions

¹ The male working population has been taken to include the proportion of males between 15 and 60 years of age inclusive.

² PP 1801 (140) VI op.cit.

³ N.M.M. POR/F/21. 10.8.1797.

in particular the Navy and the Dock Yard. No industry or occupation has been discovered that could have rivalled the Yard as the main spring of the local economy. Much of the employment not directly provided by the Government must have been indirectly related to its activities through the enterprises of contractors. Though a number of local businessmen held government contracts (one source alone lists 13), they do not appear to have been major economic figures.¹ The biggest contractors operated from the capital or major financial and trade centres such as Liverpool.² Thus it would seem that most of Portsmouth's economic activity derived its importance only from supporting the area's role as a naval base.

Its geography, economy and population structure combined to give Portsmouth a special character. This identity was made all the more distinctive by the town's political structure. Politics, population structure and economic function created an interesting Poor Law administration and we now turn our attention to the question of politics and the Poor Law.

¹ The History of Two Acts (1796) p.655

² J.R. Harris (ed.) Liverpool and Merseyside (1969) pp 108-9.
 H.S. Kent The Anglo Norwegian Timber Trade in the Eighteenth Century Econ. Hist. R. VIII (1955) pp 62-74.
 B. Poole Navy Board Contracts 1660-1832 (1966).

Table 1.10 Portsmouth Aldermen 1782 - 1814.

Date elected

1782	Sir J. Carter
"	W. Carter
"	Jervoise Clarke Jervoise
"	R. Goodman Temple
1792	H. Bonham
"	Rev. W. White
1797	S. Gaslee
"	W. Goldson
1798	Rev. G. Cuthbert
1801	T. Bonham
"	J.A. Carter
1808	A. Atherly
"	S. Spicer
"	J. Smith
1810	E. Carter
1812	H. White
"	J. Carter
1814	Jas. Carter

Table 1.11 Portsmouth M.P.s 1790 - 1816

Date elected

1790	Thomas Erskine	Sir Henry Featherstonhaugh
1796	" "	Hugh Seymour
1801	" "	Captain Markham
1802	" "	" "
"	David M. Erskine	" "
1806	Sir Thomas Miller	Admiral Markham
1816	John Carter	" "

Table 1.12 Portsmouth Mayors 1790 - 1816

1790	W. Carter
1791	T. White
1792	J. Godwin
1793	Sir J. Carter
1794	T. White
1795	J. Godwin
1796	J. Carter
1797	S. Gaslee
1798	Rev. G. Cuthbert
1799	W. Goldson
1800	J. Carter
1801	J. Godwin
1802	S. Gaslee
1803	G. Cuthbert
1804	J. Cuthbert
1805	W. Goldson
1806	J.A. Carter
1807	J. Godwin
1808	G. Cuthbert
1809	S. Spicer
1810	Joseph Smith
1811	E. Carter
1812	J. Carter
1813	H. White
1814	W. Goldson
1815	S. Spicer
1816	E. Carter

The Borough

A Mayor, thirteen Aldermen and an unspecified number of Burgesses formed the Corporation of Portsmouth. The Mayor was chosen by the Aldermen and Burgesses. The Burgesses were selected by the Mayor and the Aldermen, one burgess being nominated every year by the retiring Mayor. The Aldermen filled their own ranks by co-option. Acting together the Corporation returned the town's two members for Parliament.¹ The Municipal Corporations' Commission started in 1835: "...it can hardly be necessary to point out the complete closeness of this system. For a long series of years it has been exercised with the undisguised purpose of confining the whole municipal and political power to a particular party and almost to a particular family."²

The party that controlled Portsmouth was the Whigs and the family the Carters, whose faction had won a fierce political battle with the Admiralty in the early seventeen eighties.³

A full history of the Carter family in the eighteenth century has yet to be written, but it would seem clear that they played an important part as radicals within the Whig movement.⁴ They challenged both the Tory dominance of Hampshire and Admiralty control of Portsmouth, also agitating for reform through the County Movement and the Society for Constitutional Information. The Carters provided Erskine with a seat when Fox needed his support for the India Bill. Fox offered Sir John Carter III a baronetcy. John Carter IV became an M.P. himself in 1816, founded the

¹ P.C.L. Portsmouth Borough Charter (1627)

² PP.1835 (116) XXIX Commission on Municipal Corporations in England AND Wales First Report, Part II p.199.

³ A. Geddes Portsmouth during the Great French Wars 1770-1800 (Portsmouth Paper No.9, 1970).

⁴ V. Bonham-Carter In Radical Tradition (1960).

Bonham-Carter family and married the daughter of William Smith the leading Unitarian politician. The Carters themselves were Dissenters moving towards Unitarianism and their family fortune was based on timber, brewing and judicious marriages. The Carters' political fortunes were supported by a large network of relatives, who numbered upwards of 70, including leading locals such as the Whites, Pikes and Cuthberts. Reference to a list of Mayors and Aldermen illustrates the political dominance of this group (see Table 1.10 and 1.11). Between 1741 and 1835 the Carters alone provided 32 mayors out of a possible 88 (Table 1.12).¹ One might be tempted to accept the judgement of John Robinson, the Duke of Newcastle's political agent who reported in 1784: "This borough is now in the hands of the Carters."² It would be a mistake, however, to regard the Carters' control as absolute.

Evidence of Opposition to the Carters

If the Carters could nominate who was to be returned to Parliament why did they not elect a member of their own local faction until 1816, when John (Bonham) Carter was returned?

In the case of Nottingham, where a Whig oligarchy of Dissenters was formed somewhat later than in Portsmouth, it has been suggested that local politicians lacked the necessary status and ability to represent their town at Westminster.³ This may be true to some extent of Portsmouth. It may have been to John Bonham Carter's advantage, as a testimony of

¹ V. Bonham-Carter In Radical Tradition (1960).

² The Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson, ed. W.T. Laprade (Camden Soc. 3rd Series XXXIII 1922) p.88.

³ M.I. Thomis Politics and Society in Nottingham 1785-1835 (1969).

of status, that he had been educated at Trinity College Oxford; but, as we have seen, the local Whigs did not lack important connections and John Carter III served as High Sherriff of Hampshire.¹ Several other reasons can be put forward for the failure of the Carters to return one of their own people to Westminster. Given a commitment to maintain reasonable relations with the Admiralty and to provide the Foxites with a seat for Erskine, there was no seat available for many years. Second, the Carters may not have wished to appear more than the first among equals; after all, Sir John Carter III had refused Fox's offer of a baronetcy. A certain personal and ethical position which forbade too great an ambition may have been mixed with the desire not to cause internal dissension among the Corporation members by arousing jealousy, or angering other groups in the town by too open an exercise of political dominance. This, of course, assumes that there was a potential local opposition to the Carters. It is now necessary to test this assumption.

The problem in trying to examine local politics in Portsmouth is that in most instances the local press is the only source of information, and generally these newspapers adopted a nonpartisan position reporting contentious issues only briefly and not very explicitly. This characteristic may have reflected the way that local politics were carried out, with few open acts of hostility.

¹ One Carter connection was already in Parliament. Arthur Artherley was a grandson of Sir John Carter. Artherley was married to a daughter of the Marquis of Lothian and elected as M.P. for Southampton in 1806. See A. Temple Patterson: A History of Southampton I (1960) p.119.

Opposition within the Corporation

The only instance of candidly reported political strife inside the Corporation arose in 1812. It took the form of a contested election for the office of Mayor. The details are sketchy and the issues almost impossible to discover but the local newspaper saw the affair as a challenge to the forty-years-old patronage of the Carters.

Usually, two candidates stood for the mayoralty: one was nominated among the Aldermen by rotation; the second candidate was put forward by the burgesses. In 1812 two candidates for the burgesses' nomination emerged, James Carter and the Reverend George Cuthbert, who was supported by the Aldermanic candidate, Samuel Spicer. Why two of the Carters' in-laws should have opposed James Carter is a mystery. Moreover, there was some sort of popular demonstration in favour of Cuthbert, who had already served as Mayor several times. One point of opposition to Cuthbert was that it was not felt proper that a clergyman should exercise magisterial powers.¹ In the event, Carter defeated Cuthbert by twenty two votes to twelve and was elected Mayor over Spicer by twenty four votes to ten, a convincing demonstration of the Carters' control of the Corporation.² No permanent split appears to have developed after the contested election. The old pattern of local politics continued. However, though there was no opposition at the next election, the continued existence of some ill feeling towards the Carters was evinced in 1816.

¹ Cuthbert's religious affiliation is not known, but it seems unlikely that as a Carter in-law, he was an Anglican. Therefore it seems unlikely that this issue was related to radical objections to Anglicans sitting on the bench. Cf S. & B. Webb, The Parish and the County (1960). pp 358-60

² Hants. Tel. 28.9.1812.

This time the issue was the nomination of a candidate to fill the place of the late Thomas Miller. John Carter was nominated unanimously by the Corporation but an alternative candidate was canvassed.

John Croker was backed by about eight local people who wrote to the Mayor complaining that the Town's M.P.s had been in opposition to the Government for too long. Their candidate John Croker was secretary to the Admiralty. The interest of this incident is not the inevitable outcome, the election of John Carter, but that it shows that not everybody in the town was willing to accept the Carters' dominance and that a local politician conducted a political survey of the town, a fragment of which has survived.¹

In his note of the political situation in Portsmouth Daniel Howard said that it was difficult to discover how political power and influence were distributed but that the interest was "decidedly in favour of the Carters". Howard makes it clear that the political situation in Portsmouth was complex and that the Carters' position was founded on personal relationships rather than common interests and political principles. For example, John Goodwin, a leading Alderman, was "... more a Tory than a Whig" and at one time had been of "... different sentiments from Sir John Carter and inclined to support the Administration, more from circumstances than from principle." However he was very attached to John Carter for personal reasons and had supported the Carters against Cuthbert and Spicer in the election of 1812. Besides being a Tory, Goodwin was also a churchman with a small political following of preemptory burgesses (i.e., men nominated as burgesses by himself at the end of his terms of office as Mayor). In contrast to Goodwin

¹ P.C.R.O. CE/10 Notes by D. Howard relating to the election of John Carter as M.P. in 1816.

was R.G. Temple, a friend of the Carters and also thought to be a Unitarian. Howard infers that Temple was a Whig but one who favoured a political "balance" in the town. Since the "popular mania" caused by the "Heat of Politics occasioned by the French Revolution", Temple had favoured ministerial candidates for M.P.s, bringing Lord Hugh Seymour in 1796 and favouring another Admiralty representative, John Markham, in 1801.¹ But Temple tried to avoid appearing partisan. Howard's analysis goes no further but he makes clear the fact that the Carters were not without competitors for political influence in the town.

The most obvious potential opponent of the Portsmouth Whigs comprised the Crown and its ministers. How real, how active and how successful, or otherwise, this opposition was, can be seen by looking for Admiralty intervention in Parliamentary elections and by examining the political activity of the Collector of Customs and the Resident Commissioner of the Dock Yard, two of the most important agents of the central Government in the area.

The Admiralty

Though political independence had been won for the Borough, the Admiralty and other Government agencies still wielded considerable patronage in the town. The Crown was thus able to bring pressure to bear on the County of Hampshire because of the number of County freeholders resident in Portsmouth and therefore susceptible to Government influence.² This was a situation that even the Carters

¹ See below p.551

² S. Lowe Hampshire Elections and Electioneering 1730 - 1830. (Southampton Univ. M.Phil. Thesis 1971).

could not overcome, though they were active in the Whig interest in the county. The weakness of the Carters in this respect, plus their need for the exercise of some patronage in distributing local jobs, probably explains their willingness to share Portsmouth's Parliamentary representation with the current Administration, it being understood by the latter that this was by courtesy of the Carters and not by right. For this reason it was with some deference that Earl St. Vincent, First Lord of the Admiralty in Addington's Government, asked the Corporation of Portsmouth to return his aide, Captain Markham, as M.P. for the town at a by-election in 1801.¹ The local oligarchy were willing to oblige, and consulted the current member, Thomas Erskine. He was also agreeable as he knew both Markham and St. Vincent. Erskine had been offered a post by Addington, but he was at pains to make it clear that his approval of Markham was not the result of any obligation to the First Lord or any one else. He wrote to William Goldson, the mayor:

"You say you are glad that St. Vincent is my friend so am I. He is an excellent man and I do believe he regards me exceedingly but I do assure you I never wish to represent Portsmouth but as the friend of Sir John Carter bound by him by every tie of Honour gratitude and affection."²

Clearly, even allowing for the language of eighteenth century politics, the Carters had firm control over Portsmouth's Parliamentary representation. The Admiralty was in the position of a supplicant, though one with the means of returning favour for favour.

¹ Letters of St. Vincent ed. D. Bonner Smith (Navy Record Soc II 1921).

² P.C.R.O. cc 7/43-50 Documents concerning D. Howards proposed History of Portsmouth.

The use of political patronage in Portsmouth would make an interesting study, but for the moment we must merely note that one Carter was a Naval Officer and another was in the Customs Service.¹

The Opposition of "loyalists"

As has been shown the central Government had many agencies in Portsmouth and it is feasible to suppose that the Crown and Administration could use these to embarrass the Corporation. Alternatively, it might be expected that the men who held office would have formed a natural pro-government faction in opposition to the radical Whigs of the Corporation. This group is termed "loyalist" because it is most easily discerned in the loyalist anti-radical agitation of the early seventeenth nineties. After popular political activity decreased, the group had fewer occasions to be active. Though nearly every member of the "loyalists" could be named, one man's career can be taken as a general illustration.

Elias Arnaud was Collector of Customs at Portsmouth, and was also a County Justice for the Portsdown Division with John Carter. Arnaud's name was prominent in every pro-Government committee and association formed during this period. In 1792, Arnaud led the Loyalist Association movement; in 1795 he headed the local campaign in support of the repressive Two Acts. The following year he commanded the volunteer movement. Arnaud also chaired meetings which addressed the King on his escape from a purported assassin and which raised money for the national defence fund of 1798.² All these roles might be expected to

¹ H. Slight Edward Carter, a biographical memoir (Portsmouth 1850).

² Ports.G. 16. .1795
 " " 28. 4.1798
 Hants Tel. 4.3.1811
 See below p. 578

have been the prerogative of the Mayor. The Mayor and his colleagues, however, were conspicuous by their absence from the group of activists around Arnaud.

It is difficult to identify the activities of the opposition group in local politics, as conflict was rarely openly reported. It usually only becomes discernable when the issues in dispute were dealt with at a town meeting leading to the formation of an organization whose members can be identified. When none of the Carter faction were involved in arranging such a meeting, or in the ensuing organisation, it is likely that the aims and principles of the Carters were not served by such events and bodies. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that those meetings were the work of a group in opposition to the Corporation. When the meetings are arranged time after time by the same group this assumption bears all the more weight. It is worth noting that, when the Mayor fulfilled that part of his office which put him in the chair at meetings where some controversy arose, a point was always made of thanking him for his impartiality. This was even the case when the issue was one such as pledges of loyalty to the Crown, where a strong consensus might have been expected. It would therefore seem that townsfolk presumed that the Mayor might be partisan.

Though J.C. Mottley, an official of both the Yard and the Customs, was one of Arnaud's leading lieutenants, government employment was not a sufficient cause of opposition nor of any political activism at all, as is illustrated by reference to the Commissioners of the Dock Yard. Charles Saxton (Resident Commissioner of the Dock Yard 1790 - 1806) appears to have played a very small role in town affairs. George Grey (Commissioner 1806 - 1829), on the other hand, was active in many social questions. This contrast may be a product of several factors. First,

any Commissioner had problems in maintaining good relations with the town so that it was ill-advised for them to become involved in local politics. For this might lead to a disruption of the work of the Yard. Secondly, Saxton and Grey were men of different social status.¹ Grey was the younger son of a powerful Whig family and was not an orthodox Anglican. For these reasons, Grey found himself in sympathy with the Carters even though his official position still led him into conflict with them. Thus Grey was active in questions of religion and education but probably avoided direct involvement in local politics, though in contrast to Saxton he was made a burgess on taking up his appointment.²

Grey's position was highlighted by his relations with the Reverend Scott, the Dock Yard Chaplain. Scott was an egotistical, bullying pluralist whose conflicts with Commissioners Saxton and Grey fill pages of Yard records. He always adopted the most conservative position on any question, even bringing an indictment against Grey under the Seditious Conventicles Act because Grey had allowed his office to be used as a Sunday School.³ Scott shows the importance of personalities in local politics. He frequently embittered issues which otherwise might have been allowed to pass without causing any dissension. Similarly, Grey illustrates how a combination of personality and the responsibilities of a particular official position must modify our notion of an anti-Corporation group based on "placemen". Moreover, the scores of Dock Yard Officials in general appear to have kept clear of politics. For example, a list of leading loyalists published in

¹ See below p.

² R. East Extracts from the Portsmouth Corporation Records. (1891)

³ Hants. Tel. 5.8.1811. See below p. 136

1796 names six Customs men and only two Yard Officials, one merely a clerk, the other a Quartermaster.¹

Whatever the tensions within Portsmouth there is no evidence to suggest the opposition was instigated from without by the Crown and its ministers. Where the Corporation did come into conflict with the central Government it was indirectly over local issues and through the Government's local agencies, generally operating independently of their higher authorities.

Of the many Government institutions in Portsmouth there is only evidence of friction between the Corporation and the Dock Yard: the garrison, and other army and militia units, the Ordnance, the Victualling Office and the Customs all appear to have co-existed peacefully with the Town authorities.² Even in the case of the Dock Yard the issues of contention were more of the nature of administrative wrangles rather than political disagreements. Several incidents demonstrating the relationship between the Yard and the Town have already been touched upon; for instance, the Yard's opposition to economic development in the area. Later, the magistrates' defence of their office against possible encroachments by the Resident Commissioner will be considered, but there are other examples of tension between the town and the Yard that can be described here. There were petty issues such as the refusal of the Yard to supply the Corporation with cheap junk (old rope) for use as raw material in the Town Gaol, and the Corporation's insistence that the Yard Taphouse be properly licensed.³

¹ The History of Two Acts (1796) p.655

² Occasional friction between the army and the Corporation did occur. The Portsmouth Telegraph reported, 3.11.1799, that the military had tried to search a house for a deserter without a J.P. being present. In consequence of complaints from the magistrates the army apologised for the incident.

³ NMM POR/G/2 17.5.1809.

When the Mayor and Corporation tried to enter the Yard in 1807, on their perambulation of the Borough boundaries, they were halted at the gate until they had assured Commissioner Grey that they did not intend to assert any "Right to or over the soil in the Dock Yard".¹ A year later the Commissioner complained that his and other Yard Officers' rates had been increased. This Grey considered "... an arbitrary Act of the Parish Officers", and he said that they threatened to levy distress on his goods. After consultations with the Admiralty Solicitor's Agent, the Commissioner gave way and paid the rate, but his reaction reflects the bad feeling that soured relations between the Town and Yard.² Moreover, this incident must be seen in relation to the fact that Portsea's parish officers were Dock Yard employees who may have taken the opportunity to harry/ass the Yard authorities. Even so, they could hardly have done so without the connivance of the magistrates.³ Another source of friction was the Admiralty Solicitor's Agent's function as coroner over the harbour, for the town claimed the same jurisdiction.⁴

It is ironic that the Corporation should have been in a state of petty hostility with the Dock Yard, the personnel of which played so small a part in local politics. Perhaps the Corporation was afraid of the Yard as a potential source of opposition to their control of the borough; so that they sought to intimidate the Yard by creating conflict over minor issues. In return the Yard officers responded with a similar pettiness.

¹ NMM POR/D/28 25.9.1807

² NMM POR/F/29 18.11.1808
 " " /G/30 30.11.1808
 " " " 7.2.1809

³ See below p. 84

⁴ See below p. 457

In all, while it seems likely that there was some measure of opposition to the Carters it cannot be assumed that the "loyalist" group which constituted part of that opposition was necessarily composed exclusively of men in Government employment. Though men like Arnaud, the Collector of Customs, Thomas Mottley, Customs Surveyor and Dock Yard Inspector, and Moses Greetham, the Admiralty Solicitor's local agent, and businessmen holding government contracts were leading "loyalists", there is no evidence to suggest that "loyalism" was automatically an attribute of government service. In particular, the Dock Yard was not a focus of opposition to the Corporation.

Political opposition in Portsmouth had no forum, such as a common council or body of freemen, in which to display itself or where a cohesive group could grow and develop when there was no immediate issue to be contested. The loyalists were not permanently active rivals to the Corporation. They were most apparent in the 'nineties when there were issues which could be publically aired. Town meetings were the only opportunity Portsmouth's inhabitants had of taking some part in major political debates and even the Carters could ^{not} refuse to call such a meeting when it was to pledge loyalty to the Crown. When such an excuse for a meeting was not available opposition groups had to fume in silence. Inevitably, therefore, public opposition to the Carters was generally tinged with "loyalism". Moreover, there tended to be a displacement of political energies away from borough institutions to the parishes.

Parochial and Denominational Rivalry

Parochial rivalry between Portsmouth and Portsea and conflict between Dissenters and Anglicans were two important causes of dissension in the Borough. The hostility that the inhabitants of Portsea sometimes evinced for Portsmouth may be rooted in social differences, the plebeian^e character of the former contrasting with the gentility of the mother town. This was reinforced by an administrative squabble over the Poor Law.

Besides the matter of Poor Law Administration, which is considered in detail later, the rivalry between Portsea and Portsmouth can be illustrated by reference to several issues, beginning with the Volunteer movement, which instead of uniting the inhabitants behind the Government against foes from without and traitors from within, revealed political and social divisions. In the first place the Corporation stood aloof from the founding of the local volunteers. When the Mayor did offer the services of the Corporation to the Government, it was in the face of the threat of invasion and through the means of a town meeting called to consider a plan for enrolling the population in a garrison defence force.¹ The fact that there were already two bodies of volunteers in existence appears to have been ignored by the Corporation.

The fact that two units of volunteers existed in the area was not due to an excess of martial ardour. Originally Elias Arnaud had helped organize a company of volunteers for the whole Isle of Portsea, with himself as captain.² Shortly after this, however, a rival group of volunteers was formed as the Portsea "Loyal Independent" Company.³

¹ Ports. G. 30.4.1798

² Ports.G. 29.11.1796
 " " 5.12.1796

³ Ports. G. 26.12.1796

In the context of eighteenth century politics the word 'independent' must not be taken too lightly, though its exact significance varied from case to case. For example, in Liverpool an "Independent" volunteer force was formed by an anti-corporation group seeking to end corruption in local government.¹ There is no reason for thinking that the Portsea Volunteers were opposed to the Corporation, who were after all, largely indifferent to the whole affair. Rather the Portsea body was probably a rival to the Portsmouth company and Elias Arnaud. It seems probable that the founders of the second detachment of volunteers (an attorney and a tradesman) were not of the same status as Arnaud. Some idea of the status of the original recruits to the Portsmouth Volunteers is given by an announcement that to encourage recruiting, "...any person may now enrol without having his jacket trimmed with lace."² Further, when "The inhabitants of Kingston Cross (a suburb of Portsmouth) and its vicinity, not merited by a fondness for power, show or rank, but seriously impelled by a desire to render themselves useful subjects", requested arms and training, it might be inferred from their language that volunteers were regarded locally as rather presumptuous.³

A number of petty incidents continued to show the rancour between the rival volunteer groups.⁴ An attempt by Arnaud and Mottley to found a joint company of artillery, "...a happy reunion of the kindred and nearly allied Towns of Portsmouth and Portsea", collapsed when the formation of the Portsea Independent Company of Artillery was announced.⁵

¹ A.V. Mitchell Radicalism and Repression in the North of England 1791 - 1797. (M.A. Thesis Manchester 1958).

² Ports. G. 23.4.1798

³ Ports. G. 6.5. 1798

⁴ Ports. G. 13.3.1797
" " 15.10.1798

⁵ Ports. G. 20.3.1797

The Volunteers remained embodied until May 1802, occasionally doing garrison duty but refusing to serve beyond Portsea Island. When war recommenced the Volunteers were again raised. This time, however, no rival factions arose and there was one joint force for the whole Island.¹ Such harmony might have been induced by invasion fears but the creation of a Dock Yard Volunteers Regiment may have prevented the emergence of a Portsea company of volunteers. Moreover, the tensions created between Whig and Tory elements in Portsmouth during the seventeen nineties by the radical agitation may have exacerbated the division within the volunteers. When the second volunteer movement occurred no such cause of dispute existed, so that a single organization could be created. Nevertheless, the breach between the parishes did not heal entirely.

The bitterness of feeling between the parishes and of the opposition to the Corporation was further demonstrated when dissension broke out at a meeting called in Portsea to frame an address to the Prince Regent on the assassination of Prime Minister Percival. Scott, the Yard chaplain caused the controversy by suggesting that the address should be presented by County M.P.s and not by the Borough members. This tactic had been used by the loyalists in the seventeen nineties when they wished to express support for Government policies which the Town's members were known to oppose. Scott was supported by others at the meeting, one of whom said:

"... as an inhabitant of the Town and Parish of Portsea, he considered himself to be represented by the members of the County only (hear! hear! hear!) and he thought they were the most proper persons as independent Englishmen to carry his sentiments to the foot of the throne, and it was therefore his wish that the

¹ Ports. Ch. 8.5.1802.

address should be entrusted to their case only."¹

Edward Carter, the Mayor, opposed this suggestion, saying that he was sorry that the address had been made a party or political matter. He appealed to the meeting for support and in fact a compromise arrangement was made. The address was to be presented jointly by the town members and County M.P.s. Carter was thanked for his impartiality. A similar meeting held in Portsmouth arrived at the same decision.² Even the framing of separate addresses by the two parishes indicates the division between Portsea and Portsmouth. The affair also demonstrates the rancour that existed over the closed nature of the town's parliamentary representation. In fact, as county freeholders, some of the inhabitants would have been enfranchised and their elected representatives would have been the County members.

Though there is further evidence of conflict between the parishes this is best considered in the context of a study of Poor Law administration. Here it is possible to consider, briefly, religious strife.

Little is known about the religious complexion of Portsmouth, but it was clearly not simple. The town contained, besides Anglican churches, and chapels, catholic places of worship, thirteen non-Anglican chapels, and two synagogues.³ The capacity of the Anglican churches was very small in relation to the population; both together could only hold about 2,500 people.⁴

The Carters appear generally to have kept clear of the religious aspect of vestry affairs in both Portsea, St. Mary's, and Portsmouth,

1 Hants. Co. 25.5.1812

2 Hants. Co. 16.1.1812

3 Hants. Co. 13.4.1800

4 Hants. Co. 12.12.1815

St. Thomas's. However, they were not totally indifferent to the needs of the Anglicans, and it was said in 1812 that the Mayor was going to apply to Parliament for the creation of two new parishes.¹ But the religious affiliations of the Carters barred them from active involvement in vestry politics. Moreover, there may have been definite advantages in this situation for the Corporation. A share of local administration and influence was left open to groups who were otherwise excluded from the foci of power.

Arnaud appears, once again, as the leading figure in Portsmouth vestry. His and his colleagues' views were revealed by their reaction to the introduction of an itinerant preacher into the Poor House, where he was allowed to instruct the children. The vestry:

"Joined in a declaration to defend the Established Church and religion of this realm, against the Encroachments and innovations of all Sectarianism being fully convinced that the Suff^erance of Any Alteration of the Religious Principles of the rising Generation, is pregnant with Danger to the Church and State - and that the strict observance of the Religious Duties as laid down by the former is one of the firmest supports of the latter."²

Such orthodoxy can hardly have been echoed by members of the Corporation and it may not have gone unchallenged. James Paffard, parish overseer, published a "Candid Address to the Parishioners of Portsmouth" on the issue. Unfortunately this pamphlet has disappeared.³

Despite its views the vestry was not closed to popular influence. When in 1797 the vestry complained that the vicar was not resident and that his curate was also absent, it was asked to nominate a new curate. This was done by means of a poll of parishioners. Some of those who

¹ Ibid. 12.12.1815

² P.C.R.O. 22/A/21/2 27.10.1801

³ Ports. G. 3L.11.1801.
P.C.R.O. 22/A/21/2 2, 5.1811. Another hint of conflict between the town's Dissenters and nonconformists on the one hand and the Anglicans on the other, occurred when complaints were made that the Parish Clerk had been canvassing on behalf of a candidate who was not attendant on the Established Church for the post of Parish Warden.

voted were illiterate, suggesting that they were of low social status.¹

In contrast to Portsmouth the parish of Portsea appears to have been controlled by workers from the Dock Yard, all the parish officers being chosen from the shipwrights and fulfilling their duties on a fulltime basis.² The religious affiliation of the Yard workers is difficult to judge but the number of non-conformist chapels in the area, the long history of Methodism in the town and the fact that a number of Yard workers were lay preachers all suggest that as far as they were actively involved in any denomination, the Yard People were probably non-conformist.³ Even so, the involvement of the Yard artizans in Church affairs was not due to any religious affiliation but rather a desire to control the Poor Law. In 1801 a newspaper published in Portsmouth jibed: "The state of the Church of England in a neighbouring Parish is at so low an ebb for want of zealous defenders that the committee now employed to regulate the affairs of the church (consists) principally of the members of the Romish and Presbyterian persuasions."⁴ The neighbouring Parish could well have been Portsea for events were to show that the Anglican church was in want of friends there. In 1813 the Yard workers intervened decisively in vestry affairs when it was proposed to repair the church. One yard worker recorded: "The People of the Yard Great Number lost Half Day Work and whent and oppose it."⁵ (sic)

¹ P.C.R.O. 22/A/21/2 14.3.1797

² See below p. 84

³ H. Co. 13.9.1813
H. Tel. 3.3.1804
H. Tel. 5.8.1811
 D. Copper Methodism in Portsmouth (Portsmouth Paper No.18 1973)

⁴ Ports. G. 3.11.1801

⁵ P.C.R.O. A/3 Dock Yard worker's Diary.

A vote turned down any proposal to enlarge or rebuild the church, despite the protest of Sir Roger Curtis that the existing building was so old and overcrowded that he did not even own a pew. Religious feelings may have been running high at this time. Only a year or so previously, Sidmouth had attempted to make the issuance of preachers' licences more strict, and rivalry between the Dissenters and the Anglicans had been excited by the controversy over the Bell and Lancaster systems of education.

In Portsmouth the Lancasterians, backed by the Dissenters, were the first to become organised. Bell's Anglican supporters were quick to follow. Their first meeting was chaired by the Mayor, Edward Carter, who felt it necessary to note the honour done him in his being invited to take the chair, "... as he differed in many particulars from the opinions entertained by the present meeting."¹ The newspaper noted that the audience was mainly gentry and clergy and that two of the main speakers had been Commissioner Grey and the Rev. Scott. Grey made a cautious defence of the Lancasterian system. Scott was bitter in his attack on it. The controversy caused by Scott was extensive and was well reported in the press as one Editor was a Dissenter involved in the affair. A long satirical attack on Scott portrayed him as a papist priest. Scott objected when the Resident Commissioner's brother was invited to preach a fund-raising sermon on behalf of the Bell society.² However, the desire to utilise education as an instrument of social control prevented a further rift developing between the rival societies and Bell and Lancasterian schools were soon established.³

¹ Hants. Co. 30.8.1813

² Hants. Co. 15.10.1812

³ Hants. Co. 3.2.1812
 " " 15.9.1812

Though they were rarely articulated or made explicit there were obviously tensions and divisions in Portsmouth society. The lines of division and some of the causes of contention have been outlined. Were there any alliances between groups which crossed those divisions?

If the craftsmen and labourers of the Dock Yard were Dissenters, as has been suggested, then there was an affinity between them and the Corporation. Further it will be shown that the Yard People and the Carters exchanged services: the shipwrights came forward to aid the civil powers in time of riot: the Carters intervened with the naval authorities on behalf of the Dock Yard's labour force and allowed the Yard People to control the administration of the Poor Law in Portsea. The result was that, with the aid of the Yard workers, the Carters were able to control a potentially turbulent population. Because they were able to maintain law and order and avoid open political strife, the central Government never sought to challenge the Carters' *hegemony in the borough*, the political importance of which was probably dwarfed by its role as an arsenal. In war time the efficiency and security of the military and naval facilities in Portsmouth would have depended on how well the town was governed. Without the support of the Admiralty or the Crown the opposition to the Carters remained fragmentary, ineffective and sporadic, though never entirely extinguished. However, there remained enough opposition and conflict in the town, and enough ambiguity in the relationship between the Corporation and the Government to make the Carters look for support from the Yard Workers.

The Administration of Poor Relief

If the maintenance of law and order was the first concern of local government, the administration of poor relief was a close second. The magistrates in Portsmouth, however, had little to do with the Poor Law, other than to fulfil their duties in matters such as bastardy and settlement cases, which by law they had to judge. The political situation in the two parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea has already been considered. Besides the Corporation's desire to leave the vestries open to the Yard People in Portsea and the Anglicans in Portsmouth, Portsmouth's magistrates may not have been involved in Poor Law matters because their Corporation never had the strength of being based on a large and wealthy merchant Community with an interest in keeping the rates low, as, for example, did Southampton.¹

The two parishes, St. Thomas' and St. Mary's, were in marked contrast and administered their poor relief in very different ways. The former was very small in area, covering Portsmouth town and was notorious for its maladministration. St. Thomas' problem was that it was overwhelmed by its responsibilities; there were only an estimated six hundred and twelve rateable houses compared with over three thousand in Portsea. In addition, the Victualling Office, which occupied much of the town's area, refused to pay rates, and the fortifications yielded only a nominal sum. What made for difficulties was that in war-time the area as a whole attracted large numbers of immigrants, many of whom had eventually to

¹ Hampshire Archivist's Group. Poor Law in Hampshire Through the Centuries (H.A.G. Publication No.1 1970) p.8.
A. Temple Patterson, op.cit. p.117, suggests that even in Southampton, where the Corporation was represented on a Poor Law Union Board of Guardians, the Corporation had ceased to be closely involved in Poor Law matters by the early nineteenth century.

seek relief or aid in returning to their own parishes. Destitutes tended to go to Portsmouth where the magistrates resided.¹ Thus, for 1794 the total receipts of Portsmouth parish were £2,778, not far off Portsea's £2,995.² Clearly this meant a much higher rate per house in St. Thomas parish than St. Mary's. Portsmouth's inhabitants claimed that there were fifteen rates a year at such a high level as to discourage new buildings.

The third factor in Portsmouth's maladministration was that its overseers were elected anew every year, so that no body of experienced administrators was built up. Eden stated, in 1797, that a salaried and permanent overseer had been appointed but this must have been a temporary experiment. A vestry committee complained in 1805 that overseers only served a year at a time.³

Portsea was very different to Portsmouth. All the parish officers were regularly chosen from the Yard's shipwrights and they tended to serve for long periods. Because the parish was so large and the duties associated with it so numerous, the Church Wardens and other officials had to attend to them full-time. In 1804 five shipwrights given leave to serve as parish officers received day pay and overtime. This arrangement caused the Navy Board considerable concern when they discovered it.

Initially Commissioner Saxton shared the Board's attitude.

"I am aware of no real benefit derived on account of the Assessments to the Public, or to individuals belonging to the Yard - But I have little doubt that it has hitherto been lucrative to the Parties themselves who have held it almost as a perpetuity and that the Magistrates may prefer the People of the Yard, many reasons naturally suggest themselves. - But not a stroke of Work do any of them do besides - but to come to call - unless they chuse to say they are sick to avoid it."⁴

¹ P.R.O. ADM 15125 31.12.1795

² F. Eden op.cit.

³ P.C.R.O. 22/A/21/12/2.
Ports.G. 7.5.1797

⁴ P.R.O. ADM /106/ 1869 13.11.1803

Table 1.14 Portsea Parish Overseers 1793 - 1812

Date of Election	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13
Daniel Collins	•	•																			
William Blake													•	•							
James Brend	•																				
William Edney												•	•								
Edward Fowles															•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Johathan Gain														•							
John Helby			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•										
Henry Hill							•	•		•	•										
William Hill															•	•	•	•	•	•	•
John Lawes	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•												
Richard Martin											•	•									
William Newton				•		•							•								
Thomas Parish										•											
William Penn	•	•	•									•	•								
John Penney											•										
John Simmonds											•										
Joseph Smithers														•							
Thomas Stoneham												•	•	•							
James Taplin				•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
George Turner											•										
Richard Warner															•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Thomas Wolcol- Woodman.														•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

It is a pity Saxton was not more explicit on the reasons why there should be a natural affinity between the Yard men and the magistrates. He clearly thought them too well known to bear further detail. He did, however, add that 5 Yard workers had probably acted as parish officers since the reign of Queen Anne.¹ Later he modified his opinion on the importance of the Yard workers' role in the parish, defending it on the grounds that it

"... avoided much difficulty and trouble with the Magistrates - as well as litigation with the Parish generally, and afforded at the same time, considerable Protection to the Body of the Yard People, in their little Properties."²

Saxton recommended that two Yard employees should be allowed to serve every year, one as a Churchwarden and the other as an Overseer, at the old rate of pay. The Board, however, only agreed to paying the men a single day's pay until the next election.³ Looking at the names of the men who acted as Parish Officers it would appear that, for a few years after this order, there was a more rapid turn-over of office-holders; but soon the old pattern of long-term service re-emerged. (See Table 1.13 and 1.14.) One suspects that the Navy Board's order was probably allowed to lapse.

Some indication of the importance of the Yard workers' control of the Poor Law is given by a controversy which broke out in 1817. An anonymous writer accused the overseers of paying contractors as much as 90% more than the current market price for certain commodities and of misusing the issue of casual relief payments. His strongest charge, however, was that the Poor Rate was "...unfair in its construction,

¹ ibid. 17.11.1803

² N.M.M. POR/F/26 29.3.1804

³ N.M.M. POR/F/26 29.3.1804

oppressive in its nature and ruinous in its consequence."¹ The nub of the writer's criticism appears to have been that five sixths of the rate fell on one third of the householders, the rest of the rate being paid by only half the remaining householders. One third of potential rate-payers were exempt on grounds of poverty. In all, he claimed, the rates were being supported by the "middling order" or "class of person in trade". His role as spokesman for the traders was further demonstrated by his proposal that the town should be reassessed by a committee composed solely of tradesmen and a surveyor. Though he did not make an explicit attack on the Yard workers, it was implied by notations on a printed copy of the Rate Book such as: "...Is employed in the Dock Yard", and "POOR!!!" against the names of those exempted from payment. Implicit criticism of the Magistrates was also made. The writer reminded the Corporation of its legal duties and power as regards the Poor Law.

It seems plausible to suggest that the Yard workers used their control of the Poor Law to exercise patronage, if not corruption, in the Parish, and to shift the burden of the rates from themselves. There is also the possibility that 1817 saw the opening of moves which wrested Poor Law administration away from the Yard workers. In 1834 the Commission on the Poor Law reported that in Portsea parish overseers and wardens were generally tradesmen and "yeomen".²

¹ A correct copy of the Rate Book of Portsea (Portsea 1817)

² PP. 1834 XXXV p.209. Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws. Town Queries. The end of the wars saw another attack on a Yard workers institution. See below p.

The social differences between the two vestries and the problems faced by St. Thomas' probably formed the basis of the conflict between Portsmouth and Portsea parishes. "The parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea are much at variance; nor will either receive a Pauper from the other without an order for removal", noted Eden.¹ If the magistrates, who were the same in each parish, had taken a greater role in poor law administration these quarrels might have been resolved. The parishes could not even cooperate on a temporary basis, and even a joint committee set up in 1795 to help the poor, split in two.²

Despite their differences both parishes had the same attitude to the distribution of relief:

"... when persons become necessitous the parish generally insists on their going into the workhouse; by which means the expenditure is much reduced; not because the poor are maintained at a cheaper rate in the house than they could be at their own homes; but because the apprehension of being obliged to intermix with the various descriptions of indigent people, usually found in a large Poor house, deters many from making application for relief."³

A policy that Eden thought bore hardest on the "most deserving poor", it also appears to have anticipated the New Poor Law. In practice, however, there was a difference in the way the policy operated in the two parishes. Though the inmates of both houses were set to work picking oakum, Portsea house was much better run than that of Portsmouth. A mile outside the town the former was clean and spacious with its own garden. Eden stated: "The Poor appear to live comfortably". Meat was provided and there was also a tobacco ration. In contrast, Eden noted that the Portsmouth workhouse, "... is said to be neither well contrived, nor well managed". The building was old, having been constructed in

¹ F. Eden op.cit.

² Ports. G. 26.1.1795

³ F. Eden op.cit.

1725 and was sited within the town walls at the end of Warblington Street: "A very dissolute part of the town".¹ There was obviously a marked contrast between Portsmouth and Portsea in matters of Poor Law administration if not in the attitude taken towards poverty. It might now be asked if any changes in the way poverty was relieved can be discerned as the population of the area expanded during the war and as economic circumstances fluctuated.

The attention of newspapers and other periodicals was normally only attracted to the problem of poverty and the Poor Law in times of economic hardship. For example, the food crises of 1799 and 1800 were marked by reports of charity collections and public renunciations by the town's leaders of certain sorts of food.² Such periods of exceptional hardship occurred in 1795, 1799-1800 and 1811-1812. There was also much submerged poverty in the area. In 1812 a public meeting was called to consider means of relieving hardship caused by a harsh winter. A door to door collection raised £400 for the purchase of fuel. District Visitors were appointed to supervise the distribution of the coal or wood. In their rounds, the visitors: "... ascertained the actual existence of more real misery and distress than can be easily conceived, not only among those who are ostensibly the Poor, but among those who suffer SILENTLY the pressure of want, disease and all the wretchedness of poverty."³ Who were the silent sufferers of poverty and why were they to be distinguished from the ostensibly poor? Unfortunately it can only be suggested that the difference between the two lay in being employed on the one hand and unemployed, old, sick and vagrant on the other. It is

¹ W. Brayley and J. Britton. The Beauties of England and Wales 6. (1805) p.238.

² See below p. 514

³ Hants. Tel. 27.1.1812

unlikely that the visitors would have become aware of distressed gentle-folk, as one presumes that they would have visited the households of labouring men in seeking clients for their charity.

Winter was always normally marked by greater hardship than the other seasons of the year. In 1814 the Poor Law authorities decided to use a £100 gift from the Prince Regent to buy coals for the poor during the coming months rather than to spend it on a dinner for the poor to celebrate the Prince's birthday.¹

The most serious challenge to the Poor Law and local charities came after 1814 when the end of the war was imminent. The Ladies Benevolent Society voiced a warning in its eighth report.

"If amidst the privations incident to a protracted war this society has been able by the aid of a liberal Public, thus to soothe the woes of suffering humanity, it is earnestly hoped that now, when a happier era begins to dawn, the same generous regard that has hitherto been shown to the purposes of the Institution, will be continued. For though the merciful dispensation of Peace may restore comfort and plenty to thousands, it must not be forgotten that it will necessarily produce much distress among numbers, who depend for support and maintain their families by various employment under government; and other sources arising out of a state of warfare, but of which they are unavoidably deprived."²

The resumption of hostilities delayed the full effects of peace so that the situation predicted by the benevolent ladies did not develop until 1816. The Monthly Magazine reported:

"Numbers make application to Portsea Poor-house, but that house is filled and the towns throughout present hundreds of half-fed, half-clothed persons who have not yet applied for relief."³

By Autumn, conditions were so bad that a vestry meeting was called in Portsea. It was reported that there ^{were} 650 people in the poor house and many more being turned away. About 5,000 others had been relieved at a

¹ Hants. Tel. 30.7.1814.

² Hants. Tel. 21.1.1814

³ Monthly Magazine Vol (1816) pp 274, 286.

cost of £1,000 a month.¹ An earlier report said that 1,270 people were being relieved in their own homes and that 600 were on relief in Portsmouth parish.² The Portsea vestry meeting was preceded by some attempt, through handbills, to create a protest. Despite this, all went off quietly and an inter-religious committee was set up. The committee came forward with a number of proposals for employing the poor and finding additional accommodation. Besides being lent a building, the committee recommended the purchase of the redundant Portsea barracks Mess house.

Even so, the local newspaper was concerned that out-relief was so small that families were actually perishing. Soup kitchens and cost-price food were attempts to ease the condition of those turned away from the Poor House. Portsea's example in these matters was followed by Portsmouth.³

The peace of Amiens (1802 - 1803) had been marked by distress in the same way as was the end of the Napoleonic wars. Peace was accompanied by an administrative overhaul of the Dock Yard so that there was both a very rapid demobilisation and the discharge of civilian personnel. A local newspaper pointed out in December 1802 that of 323 men discharged from the Yard, 271 were still out of employment and many of their families reduced to the greatest distress, some indeed have been under the necessity of procuring asylum in the workhouse,"⁴ Saxton underlined this report when he informed the Navy Board that many old labourers recently dismissed had twenty or thirty years "servitude" and were now

¹ Hants. Ch. & Co. 30.11.1816.

² Hants. Ch. & Co. 7.9.1816.

³ Hants. Tel. 26.12.1816.

⁴ Ports. Ch. 11.12.1802.

in "circumstances of extreme distress ... walking about the streets and suffering without Pay or Pension."¹

Besides providing information on those periods when poverty reached critical levels, the local press also points to a particular feature of poverty in Portsmouth, distress among women, particularly the wives of servicemen. Concern for service personnel and their families was always most marked after major naval engagements which were usually followed by the opening of a subscription list for the relief of the wounded and the families of the bereaved. A fund for wives and families of soldiers left behind after the 1793 expedition to the West Indies was another example of local concern about this form of distress.² When a similar situation arose in 1800 the army took steps to look after the families until they could be sent to their homes.³

A more systematic attempt to deal with the problem of destitute women dated from 1807 when an advertisement in the local newspaper announced the formation of a "Society for the Relief of the Necessitous, the sick and a lying in Charity."⁴ Known as the "Ladies Benevolent Society", the organisation quickly began operation, appointing a matron and a number of visitors, collecting clothing and linen for lying in and providing free medicine and treatment. In the first five weeks forty-nine women were aided and five turned away as improper objects. The society, like similar bodies, was anxious to discriminate between the

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/24 20.11.1802

² Ports. G. 20.11.1793

³ Ports. G. 11.8.1800

⁴ Hants. Tel. 12.1.1807
 " " 11.1.1808
 " " 9.1.1809
 " " 20.2.1809
 " " 12.11.1811
 " " 11.1.1812
 " " 21.1.1814

deserving and undeserving poor, and its policy was to refuse relief to idlers. However, this did not prevent charges being made that the organisation was attracting paupers to the town and in fact the society did not turn prostitutes away. Throughout its wartime existence the Ladies Benevolent Society's main concern remained the relief of servicemen's wives, particularly with medical aid. For instance, in 1809 the good ladies were helping two hundred women and children who had returned with the army from Spain, 10% of whom were advanced in pregnancy. An important secondary function of the society was the removal of women with families to their own parishes. To this end, the ladies arranged cheap rates of carriage; and the removal of distressed women assumed an important part of the society's operations, as is shown by the following figures.

Table 1.15

Year	Numbers helped home	Medical Aid	Total relieved in other ways
1807	130	604	125
1808	348	1339	395
1809			
1810	392	1272	457
1811	712	1315	
1812		1486	
1813		1380	360

The effectiveness of the society is difficult to judge, but, compared to the total number of people on permanent relief, the level of distress relieved by the Benevolent Society is impressive, though we have no indication of how much destitution remained untouched. The data permit a comparison between the numbers aided by the L.B.S. and the

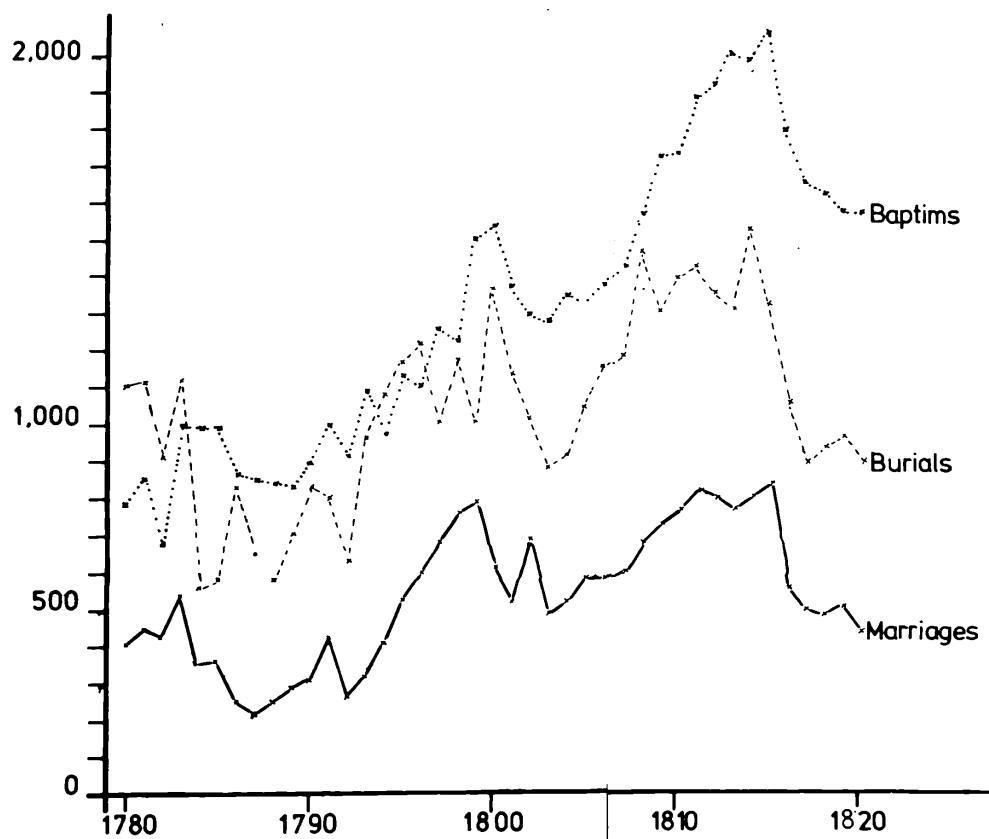
Poor Law for the year 1813. The number aided by the Benevolent Ladies is equivalent to 50% of those on permanent relief, without, that is, making any allowance for double counting.

To summarize, two main points would seem to emerge from a survey of the press. First, no local people worried that the Poor Law was coming under cumulative strain as the population grew. Attention was only drawn to the problem of destitution during periodic crises. The exception to this rule, poverty among women, makes the second point worth noting: the organisation of the Benevolent Society shows that there was a level of concern about female poverty which led to a continuing response. We can give some statistical support to these two conclusions.

It is possible to measure long term movements in the amount of poor relief for Portsmouth only. Even then, there is only data for permanent relief.¹ Casual relief figures are likely to have been much more sensitive to changing circumstances. However, the fluctuations in the level of permanent poor relief, in the Poor House and parish doles, conform to the expected pattern (see Graph 1.2). The out-break of hostilities and the return of peace are well marked as are the food shortages. Perhaps most striking is the low long dip on the graph after the resumption of war in 1803 and the very steep rise when the war ceased altogether. The first suggests that most of the first decade of the nineteenth century was a prosperous one for Portsmouth. The big jump in the numbers claiming relief in 1816 points to the effect of a post-war slump on a population that was larger than it had been when war had first broken out.

¹ P.C.R.O. PL6/13 Portsmouth Workhouse Muster Book 1806
 " PL6/15 Portsmouth Workhouse Muster Book 1815
 " PL1/22-32 Portsmouth Overseers Accounts 1791 - 1825.

Graph 1.1



The Annual Number of Baptisms, Burials and Marriages recorded in the Anglican registers for Portsmouth and Portsea

Graph 1.2

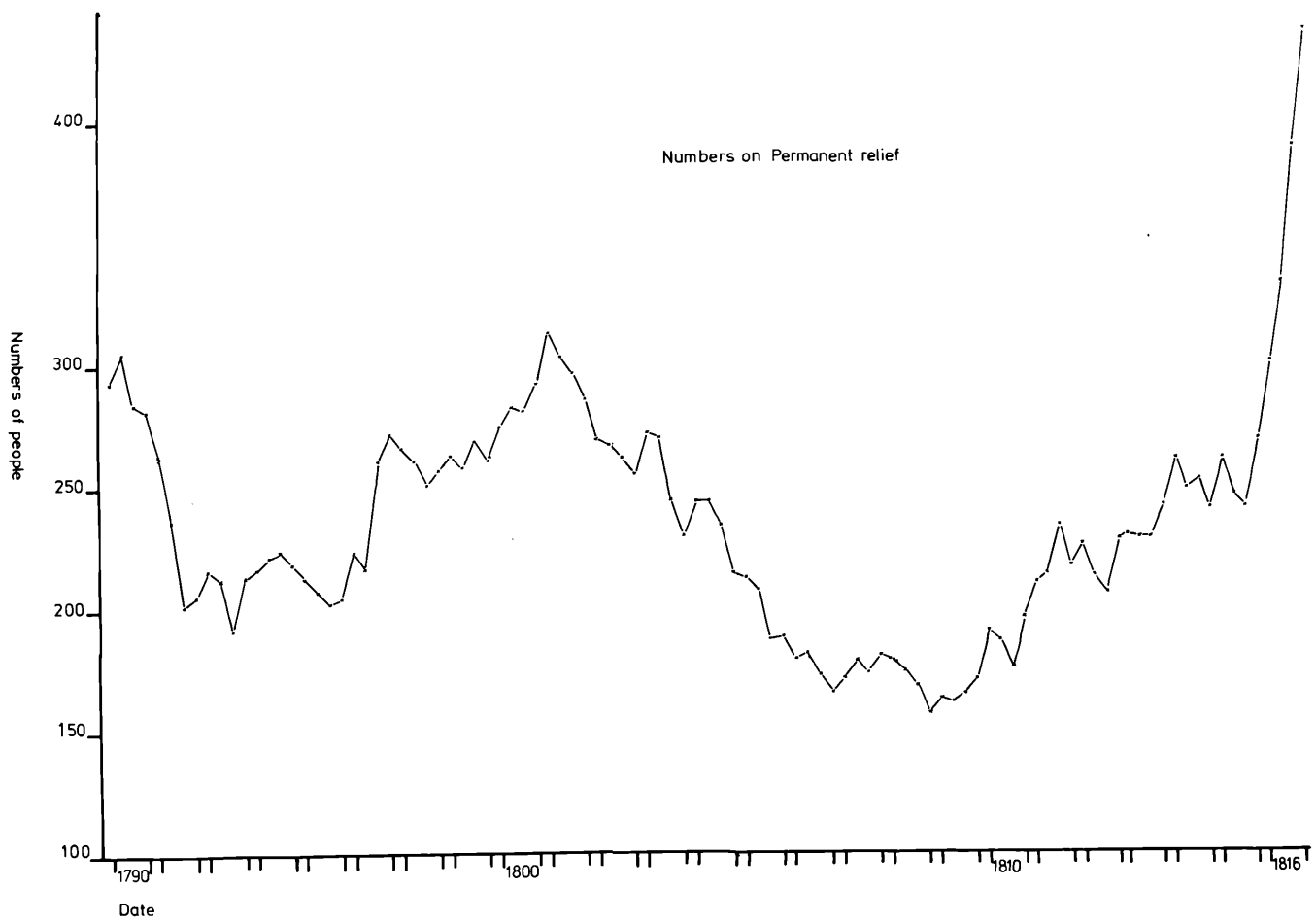


Table 1.16 An analysis of persons in receipt of out-relief for selected years

	1793	1801	1813	1823
Men	15.0%	14.8%	18.0%	38.5%
Unmarried Women and Women without children	57.0%	66.0%	38.0%	37.7%
Widows	4.6%	8.8%	28.0%	10.25%
Women with families	17.0%	2.9%	11.0%	12.5%
Children	6.0%	17.5%	4.0%	1.1%

Table 1.17 An analysis of Poor House inhabitants in 1806 and 1813.

	1806	1813
Adult Males	10.0%	14.0%
Adult Females	65.0%	68.0%
Children	25.0%	18.0%
<hr/>		
Percentage of females pregnant	13.5%	16.5%

Graph 13

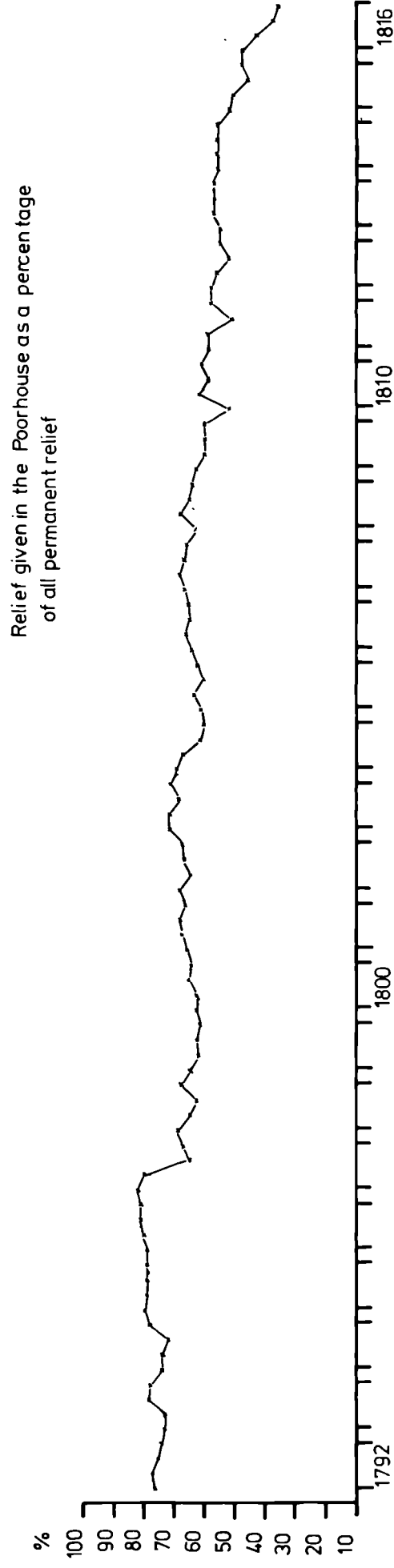


Table 1.48 Numbers on Permanent Relief

	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	1800	01	02	03	04
First Quarter	293.6	263.0	216.0	216.0	212.3	223.6	264.6	262.3	274.0	312.6	268.3	271.6	243.3
Second Quarter	305.3	236.3	212.0	221.6	207.3	216.6	291.3	257.0	282.0	302.6	266.6	269.3	243.6
Third Quarter	284.0	201.0	191.0	223.3	202.0	259.0	250.6	268.3	280.0	295.3	261.0	244.0	233.6
Fourth Quarter	281.3	205.0	213.5	218.3	204.0	271.3	256.3	260.0	291.6	285.3	254.6	229.0	214.6
	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
First Quarter	212.3	179.3	171.6	178.6	162.3	190.0	209.0	225.3	229.0	260.0	260.6	300.3	
Second Quarter	207.3	181.3	178.3	174.0	161.3	186.6	213.6	212.0	228.0	248.0	245.3	332.6	
Third Quarter	187.6	172.6	173.3	167.3	164.6	171.0	233.3	206.0	228.0	252.6	240.0	388.6	
Fourth Quarter	188.5	165.0	180.3	156.3	170.3	195.0	206.0	227.3	241.0	240.6	268.6	436.0	

Table 1.19 Relief given in the Porthouse as a percentage of all permanent relief.

	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	1800	01	02	03	04
First Quarter	76.4	73.0	74.0	80.0	79.0	82.0	69.0	99.0	63.8	66.2	68.5	72.1	70.6
Second Quarter	77.0	73.0	74.0	79.6	80.0	80.3	65.4	63.2	63.0	68.4	65.7	72.5	68.5
Third Quarter	75.7	78.0	72.0	79.8	81.0	65.3	63.0	63.8	66.0	69.6	67.1	69.6	62.0
Fourth Quarter	74.29	78.0	78.0	78.9	81.0	67.3	68.0	62.0	65.6	67.0	68.4	72.0	61.0
	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
First Quarter	62.1	65.9	67.0	64.3	64.0	53.8	60.2	59.0	56.0	57.9	53.8	49.0	
Second Quarter	64.0	67.0	69.5	69.7	61.7	63.0	60.0	57.0	58.0	57.0	52.5	45.0	
Third Quarter	61.0	66.3	68.8	66.7	61.9	60.0	52.5	53.0	58.8	57.0	47.5	39.5	
Fourth Quarter	63.6	66.2	67.8	65.0	62.4	62.0	59.3	56.0	58.0	56.9	49.2	37.8	

Notes to Tables 1.20, 1.21, 1.24 and 1.25

Tables 1.20 and 1.21 summarize some of the figures given in the Parliamentary papers. The data provided by the 1803 return is the best overall statement of poor relief we have. From it it is possible to distinguish several different forms of relief. To make this return comparable to the later report, the categories used in 1803 have to be simplified. In Table 1.22 this has been done. The proportion that each sort of relief forms of the total amount of relief given, in terms of numbers relieved, is expressed as a percentage. The Parliamentary papers also provide figures of expenditure on the poor of each parish, but only the 1803 return provides greater detail than total expenditure. These figures are presented in Table 1.24 along with figures taken from Howard's papers, which give data for the amount spent on weekly relief and casual payments; at least this is what we assume the letters C.R. and W.R. used in the manuscript mean.

Howard's figures differ from the official ones because he does not

- include expenditure on the Poorhouse; nor does he state what period of
- time his years cover. The Parliamentary returns are for the year ending the Easter of each year. The same qualification also applies to Howard's figures for the number of people relieved each year in the poor house, which are also presented with their official equivalent (see Table 1.25).

If Howard used a calendar year, as has been done in compiling our data, it might explain why his figure for 1815 is greater than the official figures for Portsea and Portsmouth combined. The parliamentary figure for 1815 would be for three quarters of 1814 and only one quarter of 1815. Nor do the official statistics for 1813, 1814 and 1815 include non-parishioners.

Table 1.20 The Number of People Receiving Various Forms of
Poor Relief in the Year Ending Easter 1803.

	1	2	3
Adults on Permanent outrelief	89	82	171
Children - 5 yrs on Permanent outrelief	36	112	148
" 5 - 14 yrs on Permanent "	46	73	119
Total on Permanent outrelief	171	267	438
Relieved in the House	306	191	497
Total on Permanent Relief	477	458	935
No. on Casual Relief	754	219	973
Total Parishioners Relieved	1231	677	1908
Non Parishioners Relieved	616	2007	2223
Total Relieved	1847	2684	4031

Key: 1 Portsmouth
 2 Portsea
 3 Total

Table 1.21. The Number receiving different forms of Relief in 1813, 1814 and 1815.

	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3
Adults on Permanent out relief	29	221	250	101	351	27	235	262	108	370	36	268	304	115	419
No. in the house	64	323	387	124	511	66	334	400	138	538	75	368	443	149	592
Total on Permanent relief	93	544	637	225	862	93	569	662	246	908	111	636	747	264	1011
Casual Relief	165	11260	11425	0	1425	161	1673	1834	0	1834	152	2221	2373	0	2373
Total	258	1804	2062	225	2287	254	2242	2496	246	2742	263	2857	3120	264	3584
			1813				1814					1815			

KEY: 1 Portsea Guildable
2 Portsea Town
3 Portsmouth

TABLE 1.22 DIFFERENT FORMS OF RELIEF AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL RELIEF

	A	B	A+B	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3					
ADULTS ON PERMANENT RELIEF	7.75	12.1	8.9	11.25	12.0	12.1	46.0	15.3	10.6	10.49	10.5	44	13.5	13.7	9.4	9.75	43.5	12.4
NUMBERS IN THE HOUSE	26.6	28.3	23.0	24.8	17.9	18.75	54.2	22.3	26.0	14.85	16.0	56.0	19.6	28.5	12.8	14.5	56.5	17.5
TOTAL ON PERMANENT RELIEF	34.4	67.8	49.0	36.5	31.0	31.0	100.0	37.8	36.8	25.3	26.6		33.0	42.2	22.3	24.0		30.0
CASUAL RELIEF	65.6	32.2	51.0	64.0	70.0	69.0		63.2	63.5	74.7	73.4		66.4 66.70 67.0	57.5	78.0	76.0		70.0
		1803		1812					1813					1814				

TABLE 1.23 THE NUMBERS RELIEVED OUT OF THE HOUSE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL RELIEF. FIGURES FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS.

	A	B	A+B	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3	1	2	1+2	3	1+2+3
	26.6	30.0	25.2	31.2	43.0	37.0	45.0	43.5	24.7	41.4	39.6	43.7	48.0

A Portsea
 B Portsmouth
 1 Guildable)
 2 Liberty)
 3 Portsmouth) Portsea

	1809	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1.	£1075	1276	1316	1422	1053	1726	1727	1980	106
2.	£ 298	305	323	376	420	486	480	1022	
3.	£1373	1581	1639	1798	1473	2212	2207	3002	
4.	-	-	-	-	7018	7231	7764	-	

Table 12.4 Expenditure on the Poor in Portsea Parish from the Howard Papers and Parliamentary Papers.

- (1) Weekly Relief from Howard's papers
- (2) Casual Relief from Howard's papers
- (3) Total expenditure from Howard's papers
- (4) Total expenditure from the Parliamentary papers

Table 1.25 The number of people relieved each year in the Portsea Poor house from the Howard Papers

	1809	10	11	12	13	14	15
The number in the Poorhouse	300	320	320	320	360	440	650
					387	400	443

Table 1.26 The Cost of two kinds of Poor Relief in 1803

	Portsmouth	Portsea
Cost of out relief	£ 513	£ 853
Cost of the house	£1764	£2825
Total	£2277	£3678

There is only a slight seasonal fluctuation. Winter did not always see the greatest poverty and the contrast between winter and summer tended to be most marked in years of low or stable food prices.

On the question of the sex differential in the Poor Law clientele an analysis of those in receipt of parish dole and the inhabitants of the Poor House sheds some interesting light. (See Tables 1.16 and 1.17) In three out of the four years selected for a breakdown of the figures for out-relief nearly 80% of all payments go to women. The year in which the men's share rises to 38% is a peace-time year when mobilisation had been completed. The rise in the number of widows relieved was probably also a function of military activity.

The analysis of work house inmates broadly confirms that women were the main part of the permanent clientele of the Poor Law. The percentage of children in the house is higher than that of those relieved outside. This situation is probably a reflection of the simple fact that unaccompanied children were likely to be best dealt with in an institution.

It is clear that a very large share of out-relief went to women who were apparently unaccompanied. Further, this situation changed over time, and the pattern may well be related to the activities of the Ladies Benevolent Society. With a reduction in demand for relief by single women there was room for an expansion in the share of relief taken by widows.

The figures that have been used so far are aggregates arrived at by lumping two sorts of relief, workhouse and out-door, together. If these are now separated and the numbers relieved in the house measured against the total number of people relieved, it is possible to detect some change in the administration of the Poor Law. (See Graph 1.3 and Tables 1.18 and 1.19) Eden noted that the Poor Law authorities in Portsmouth

deliberately limited the amount of out-relief. That this was so, when Eden wrote, is confirmed by the Graph, but it can also be seen that this situation changed, slightly. Until about 1797 there was a very stringent control of out-relief. After that date a rather more sympathetic attitude was taken, though the level of relief given in the house remained fairly constant until 1812, when out-relief rose and remained at the 40% level. With the end of the war the Poor House obviously became inadequate in the face of the demands that were made on the Poor Law; for the first time more permanent relief was given out of the house than in it. The marked change in the amount of relief given in the house in 1797 may be associated with the removal of the permanent overseer from the house, as has been suggested.¹ It is also possible that for some reason accommodation in the Poor House became limited or that inflation made it cheaper to supplement people's incomes at home rather than to take them indoors. Rising costs might be expected to affect the Poor House in several ways. As a total Institution it had to feed, clothe, house, educate and maintain the health of its residents. Those on out-relief had to manage for themselves at home as best they could.

It is possible to check some of the inferences that have been drawn from the data for Portsmouth Parish by reference to some patchy information from other sources. It is also possible to see how far what has been said of Portsmouth parish applies to Portsea parish, for which no local records remain.

Eden provides some simple and sparse data.² He stated that Portsmouth poorhouse contained about one hundred and seventy persons and that there were about forty "pensioners" on out-relief, which can be

¹ See above p. 84

² F. Eden op.cit.

broadly confirmed by the Poor Law records. Portsea house had about 164 inhabitants, though in winter there were usually 300 and over 340 had been known. Like Portsmouth, Portsea had an "inconsiderable" number on out-relief but both parishes complained of having a greater number of casual poor. The relation between the different forms of relief can also be measured by considering figures given in several parliamentary returns.¹ While these figures (see Tables 1.20 and 1.21) are not strictly comparable to those derived from the Poor Law books, they do indicate that the proportion of relief granted outside the house formed the smaller proportion of all relief, but that this figure tended to rise. (Table 1.22 and 1.23) This was as true of Portsea as it was of Portsmouth. As has been suggested, one reason for this change may have been the cost of running the poor house. In 1803 Portsmouth spent three times as much on the house as it did on outrelief, and Portsea a little more (Table 1.26). This figure is rather out of proportion to the numbers relieved in the house compared to those on out-relief. Other figures collected by a local man, Daniel Howard, suggest that the poor house had become even more expensive than the official data alone would indicate.² (See Tables 1.24, 1.25 and 1.26).

What the parliamentary figures show most clearly is the dominance of casual relief; only in Portsea during 1803 is it less than 50% of the total number relieved. However, Howard's figures would suggest that,

¹ PP 1803-4 (1175) XIII Abstract of Answers and Returns under Act 43. Geo 3, relative to the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor in England.
PP 1818 (82) XIX Report on Poor Relief under the Act 55, Geo 3, relative to the expense and maintenance of the Poor in England.

² B.M. Add. Mss. 4001 op.cit.

while casual payments may have been more frequent than regular doles, they were much smaller. The 1803 return provides information on the number of non-parish relieved. Though these non-parishioners are officially classified as vagrants, a note for Portsmouth says that most of those in this category were the wives of soldiers and sailors. The same was probably true of Portsea where in 1803 nearly four times as much relief was given to non-parishioners as to parishioners.

In all that we have considered, there is nothing to suggest that the attitudes towards poverty of the overseers of Portsmouth and Portsea differed. Officially both appear to have accepted the principle of less eligibility. Nevertheless, the greater efficiency of the Portsea authorities probably made life in their Poor House far more tolerable than life in Portsmouth's House. In 1803, which is the only year for which we have adequate data, Portsea spent about £15 per head on its workhouse population to Portsmouth's £6. In the case of outdoor relief the situation is reversed. Portsmouth spent £3 per head to Portsea's £2. However, these figures may not reflect the humanity or lack of it displayed by the overseers. Charges of inefficiency and corruption were made against the parish officials. If the accusations were true such practices would have been reflected in expenditure figures. In fact, it may have been the opportunities for applying influence that attracted the Yard workers to the Poor Law administration, rather than the chance to actually control the type and level of poor relief in their locality.

It is now necessary to determine what effect the return of peace in 1816 had on Portsmouth and its locality.

Enough has been said to show that when war ended there was a great deal of distress. Sir Frederick Eden stated the case when he wrote,

".. War is the harvest of Portsmouth; the peace which is so ardently wished for in most other parts of England is dreaded here."¹ While hostilities were in progress Portsmouth was to a large degree isolated from general economic conditions. When workers in the midlands and the north were driven to escape unemployment, Portsmouth was flourishing.² This is not to say that the weather and seasons did not affect Portsmouth. Brewing and brickmaking had well-marked annual fluctuations, and winter coal famines must have affected many trades.³ Similarly, Portsmouth felt the effects of the national shortage of cash in the late seventeenth-nineties, though there were always supplies of foreign coin available in a naval port. But peace was a much greater cause of distress than any other factor. However, it is difficult to measure how deep or long lasting the depression was. In 1816 about 10% of the population of Portsea were on relief and there was other evidence of economic decline. The numbers of debtors gaoled rose, a local bank collapsed and the revenues of the water companies fell (see Table 1.27). Population statistics took a downward turn and besides discharges, the Yard workers experienced a decline in earnings to a point where the Resident Commissioner felt that they needed two years in which to pay a year's back tax.⁴ Cobbett described vividly the state of Portsmouth in 1822.

"Those scenes of glorious loyalty, the seaport places, are beginning to be deserted. How many villages has that scene of all that is wicked and odious, Portsmouth, Gosport and Portsea; how many villages has that hellish assemblage beggared! It is now being scattered itself. Houses which there let for forty or fifty pounds a year each, now let for three or four shillings a week each and

¹ F. Eden op.cit. p.266

² A. Temple Patterson Radical Leicester (1954).

³ T.S. Ashton Economic Fluctuations in England 1700-1800 (1959);
E.L. Jones Prices and Seasons.

⁴ PRO, ADM. 106/1876 8.6.1816.

thousands, perhaps, cannot be let at all to anybody capable of paying rent. There is an absolute tumbling down taking place, where so lately, there, were such 'vast improvements'..."¹

Cobbett's picture of a ghost-town is no doubt overdrawn, but even Cobbett regards Portsmouth's decline as being of fairly recent origin. He was writing seven years after the end of the war.

In fact, there is some reason to think that peace did not have the drastic effect on Portsmouth that the statistics may suggest.

In 1815 both a cooperative brewery and a Dock Yard Pension Society were formed. Such actions must mean that the Yard workers were not all reduced to a state of destitution. In addition a savings bank for: "Tradesmen, Mechanics, Labourers, Servants and Others" was started.² There was also a spate of building and capital investment in such projects as a canal and gas works.³ Clearly Portsmouth did not suffer a total economic eclipse. In 1835 the Municipal Corporation Commission reported that, in their opinion, the post-war depression in Portsmouth had been much exaggerated. Who then swelled the numbers applying for poor relief in 1816? To this question only a speculative answer is possible.

Demobilisation lasted until 1817 and dismissals from the Yard were phased. Judging from reports in the local press the Navy Board was reluctant to dismiss men; they had been widely reported as seeking to prevent the " .. disgust and emigration of valuable workmen" .. by allowing the Yard's labour force to be reduced by natural wastage.⁴

¹ W. Cobbett Rural Rides (1967 ed.) p.79

² The Rules Orders and Regulations of the Portsmouth Dock Yard Pension Society (Portsmouth 1816).
The Articles of the Union Society (Portsmouth 1816).
The Portsmouth and Portsea Bank for Savings (1816).

³ M. Hallet op.cit.

⁴ Hants. Tel. 16.4.1813.

Table 1.27 Committals to Portsmouth Gaol for Debt.

1803	22
1804	24
1805	32
1806	40
1807	16
1808	20
1809	36
1810	44
1811	36
1812	38
1813	55
1814	64
1815	58
1816	45
1817	73
1818	31
1819	25
1820	21

Source: P.P. 1838 XXXI p.223 Third Report of the
Inspector of Prisons.

Though pressed by Parliament to retrench, and ordered to cut its wage bill the Navy Board nurtured plans to expand the Dock Yards. The transfer of the revenue service's vessels to the Navy for maintenance did something to replace the work lost by the Dock Yards.¹ An examination of the post war Dock Yard might well reveal that efforts were made to maintain as large a work force as possible and that this took the brunt of the depression for many artificers. Even in 1820 the Yard work-force was as large as it had been in the seventeen-nineties.²

Those who were hardest hit by the end of the war were probably those least established in the area: discharged seamen who had to apply for casual relief to help them home, men without homes, men and women attracted to Portsmouth because of its war-time prosperity and who dispersed themselves with less than friendly assistance from the magistrates. Further, the immigrants who had left the land to work in Portsmouth for high war wages probably returned to farming when those earnings ceased or diminished. Local people were probably cushioned against the worst effects of post war depression by reserves built up over twenty five years of prosperity.

No final conclusion as to the economic effect of Peace on the Portsmouth area and the way that Poor Law administration responded is possible without considerable research into the post war years but it must not be assumed that the Poor Law was overwhelmed by an economic depression.

Both Portsmouth and Portsea made fairly efficient responses to the problems raised by the end of the war; but as has been seen it was Portsea with its artizan organisation that took the first steps.

¹ C.J. Bartlett Great Britain and Sea Power (1963) pp 19,24.

² See below p.246

To summarize: there is no evidence to suggest that the burden on Portsmouth's and Portsea's Poor Law administration grew anything like proportionate to the area's population. In fact, it would seem that war reduced the level of poverty. However, poor harvests and the temporary suspension of hostilities increased the burden on the Poor Law. The end of the war made for particular pressure. Howard shows that expenditure on relief rose from 1814 and rocketed in 1816. In general, it has been suggested that inflation may have been responsible for a change in the way that relief was distributed. This may have been encouraged, if, as has been postulated, the end of the war threw males onto relief. The poor house may not have been considered suitable for able-bodied males. The third sort of relief, casual payments, was an important, if not the most expensive, feature of poor relief in the Portsmouth area. In war time this was due mainly to the demands of servicemen's families. Lastly, it would seem that a large part of all relief went to women. In all, it can be said that while war did not create a serious problem for the local poor law agencies it did apparently produce some destitution because migrant women without means of support were attracted to the area in the wake of men in the army and navy. Further, in respect of many of the features of its Poor Law administration, Portsmouth did not differ greatly from other areas where Speenhamland did not operate.¹

¹ J. Harris op.cit. p.35 Poor law clientele in Lancashire are typified as: the old, ill, widows and orphans. Children, particularly, found relief in the Poor House.
L.F.C. Pack A Study of the Methods of Poor Relief in the Winchester area 1720-1845 (op.cit.) Notes that the majority of relief went to the old, sick and women. Moreover, as a garrison town, Winchester attracted many women.

Conclusion

In many ways Portsmouth was similar to other seaports, industrial centres and garrison towns. It shared with these places many features of population structure and the social problems related to a high proportion of immigrants and transients. Moreover, a marked predominance of females was probably not unusual in seaports and garrison towns.

Politically Portsmouth was atypical because the oligarchy was composed of Dissenters and Whigs, who had wrested control of the borough from the Crown at a relatively early date, and had made their control over the town virtually absolute. Though we have tried to trace the lines of political division in Portsmouth it must be said that there was a lack of political discord unusual in a populous borough. This situation was not the result of any consensus among the town's folk, but rather the consequence of the absence of any area for continuous political activity and the Corporation's use of the vestries to divert political energies. It was not, however, Portsmouth's political complexion that distinguished it from other towns; what made Portsmouth very different was the presence of the Dock Yard.

Without local supplies of power or an industrial hinterland Portsmouth's economy depended on its role as a naval base, for which it was naturally equipped. Unlike other industrial towns, Portsmouth virtually depended on one industrial unit. In this respect it was similar to the factory communities established by some textile manufacturers, but it was far larger and therefore more complex than any village with a mill and a company store. Moreover, Portsmouth differed from other large ports

in that it did not have an economy diversified by the processing of a variety of imports. Similarly it lacked a large class of big merchants and financiers concerned with trade and commerce. In many ways, if it is not too much of a paradox, Portsmouth was a small town with a big population. We will now consider the reason for this situation, the Dock Yard.

CHAPTER II THE DOCK YARD

A Chronology of the Main Changes in Dock Yard Technology
and Administration 1793 - 1815.

<u>Technical Changes</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Administrative Changes</u>
	1793	Task scheme for storehouse labourers. Job scheme for mastmakers
	1795	Job scheme for boatmakers
New Basins begun	1796	
Mortar Mill	1797	
Balfour's rope-making machine Sadler's steam engine	1799	New scheme of pay for ropemakers
Basins completed Reservoir roofed Boulton and Watt steam engine, New smithy	1800	
Moveable steam engine Iron water pipes laid	1801	
	1801-03	
Peace of Amiens		
First of Brunel's machines set to work New Dock finished	1803	New method of recording job work
Metal works built	1804	New hours, New regulations on apprentices. Quartermen to be salaried, Piece work measurers appointed.
	1805	New Job prices for mastmakers. New Common hours. Labourers organised into work gangs.
Metal-working machinery installed.	1806	New hours
Steam-driven saw-mill	1807	New sick allowance
Canvass cutting machinery	1808	Sixth Report of the Commission of Revision revised and implemented.

continued ...

<u>Technical Changes</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Administrative Changes</u>
Mr. Parson's ropemaking machinery. New millwrights shop. More saw-pits.	1810	New scheme for ropemaking. First 'Superior Apprentice' entered. New task scheme for sailmakers.
Penfold's hemp-breaking machine	1811	Third and Eighth Report of the Commission of Revision implemented in revised form. New hours. All task and job prices raised 8½%. Shipwrights' gangs increased to 24.
Building slips covered	1812	Shipwrights' scheme of work raised.
Mr. Sepping's cross bracing method of shipbuilding adopted. Canvass cutting machinery.	1813	Age limit on entry of shipwrights raised from 35 to 40 years.
Mr. Perring's anchor-making method adopted.	1815	

Illustrations 2.1, .2 and 2.3 : Views of a model of the Dock Yard
in 1774

Illustration 2.1



Illustration 2.2



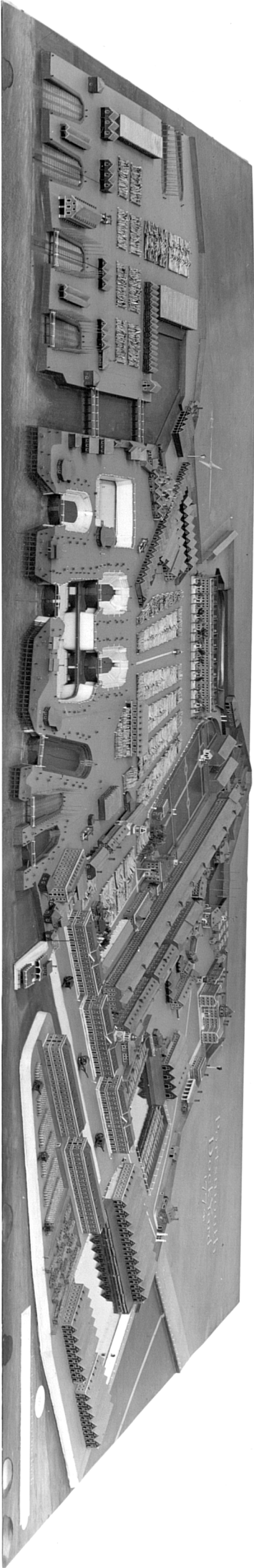


Illustration 2.5

A general picture of the Dock Yard's history and function and an outline of the major developments during our period are the essential background to a detailed examination of the Yard employees. Therefore, we will provide such a survey before going on to discuss the work and payment of the various occupational groups. After looking at the different sorts of workmen and apprenticeship, we will consider the hours worked, the wages earned, and the possibility of assessing the Yard employees' living standards. Next, in order to put what we have described into a more general context, we investigate civilian shipbuilding on the Thames. Finally, we seek to learn something of the Yard men's commitment to an industrial way of life by looking at Dock Yard discipline.

The first dock at Portsmouth was built by Henry VII, but its continuous use as a naval base dates from the Commonwealth when, in 1649, the first Navy Commissioner was appointed to take charge of the Yard.¹ From this time the Dock Yard developed gradually until it had many facilities covering about one hundred acres, much of which was reclaimed land. The vastness and complexity of the eighteenth century Yard immensely impressed contemporaries. Defoe's characterization was typical of many writers:

"These Docks and Yards are now so like a Town by themselves, and are a kind of Marine Corporation, or a kind of Government of their own within themselves."²

¹ D.C. Coleman. 'Naval Dock Yards under Stuarts', Econ. Hist. R. VI. (1954) pp 134 - 155.
H. Kitson. 'The Early History of Portsmouth Dock Yard 1496-1800.' Mariners Mirror Vol.XXXII 1947 p.256, Vol.XXXIV 1948 pp 3, 87, 271.
R.S. Horne Her Majesty's Dock Yard at Portsmouth. A duplicated report for the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (1966).

² Daniel Defoe op.cit. pp.-36-139.

Key to Map of the Dock Yard

1. Royal Naval College
2. Pay Office and Guard Room (1800)
3. Mast Houses
4. Mast Pond
5. Main Gate and Porters Lodge
6. Taphouse
7. Sail Field
8. Sail Loft
9. Rigging House
10. Camber
11. Storehouses
12. Lot Yard
13. College of Naval Architecture (1816)
14. Resident Commissioner's House
15. Chapel
16. Clerk of Cheque's Office
17. Hemp Houses
18. Anchor Lane
19. Rope House
20. Officers' Houses
21. Teamsters' Stables
22. Deal Yard
25. Wheel House
26. Offices
27. Pump House
28. Steam Kilns
29. Fresh water pump and Engine House (1799)
30. Engine House with Mould Loft above
31. Topping House
32. Saw pits (the northern-most saw-pits and timber berths were
built on land reclaimed during the seventeen nineties)
33. Joiners' shop
34. House Carpenter's shop
35. Boat House
36. Prussian Deal House
37. Covered Reservoir (1800)
38. Wood Mills (1803)
39. Working Sheds
40. North Basin
41. Lock to Camber and North Basin
42. Bricklayers' Yard
43. Stonemasons' Yard
44. Coal Yard
45. Smithery
46. Metal Mills and Foundry (1804)
47. Boat Pound

continued ...

Key to the Map of the Dock Yard (cont.)

- 48. Building Slips
- 49. Dry Docks (The southern most pair of Docks leading from
the Basin were built 1800 - 1803.)
- 50. The Great Basin (Extended 1795-1801)

The Dock Yard Wall

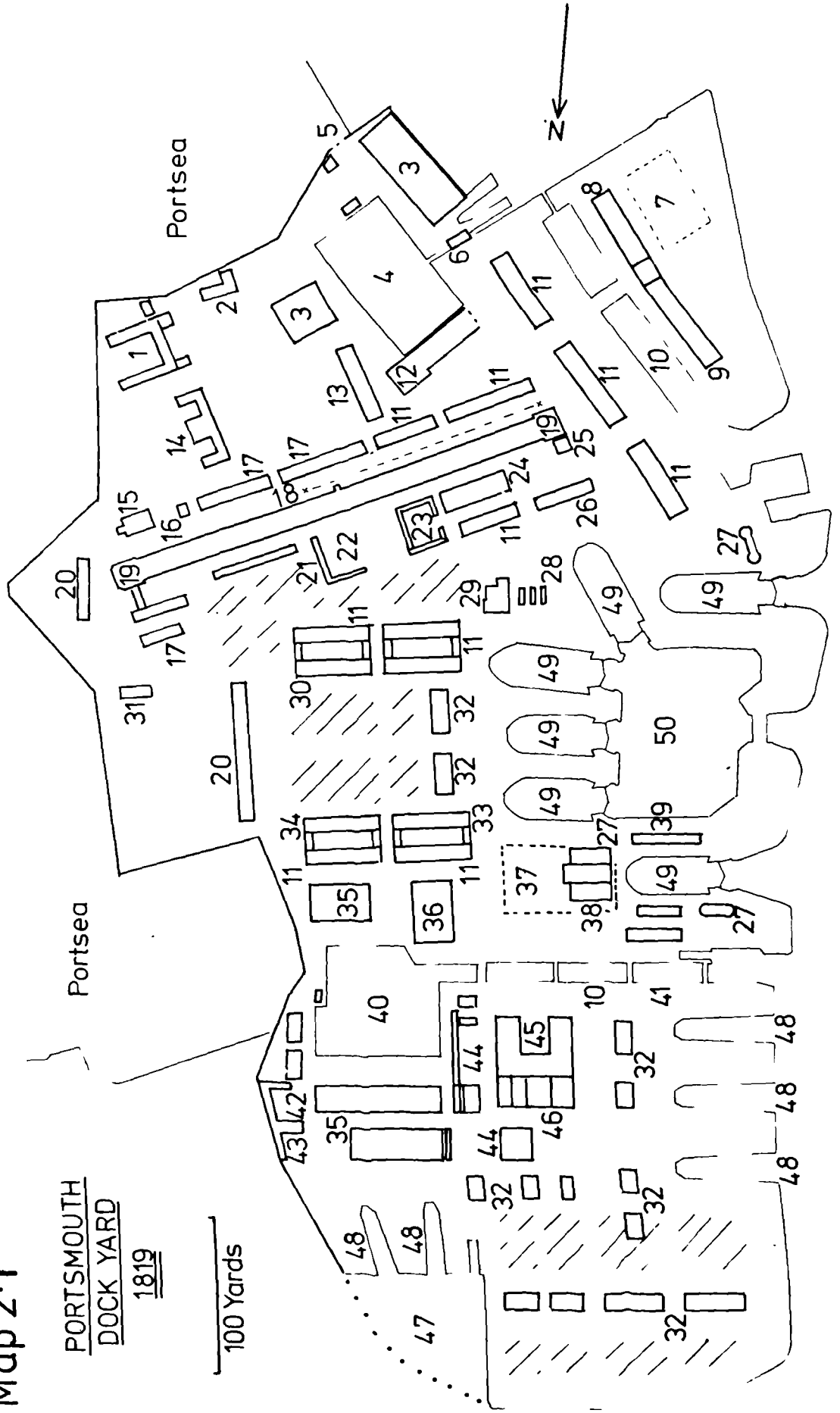
The Shore Line

Timber Berths

Map 2.1

PORTSMOUTH
DOCK YARD
1819

100 Yards



The Harbour

The work experiences of the Dock Yard men cannot be understood unless the layout and administration of the Yard are described. Reference to a map and list of the Yard establishment reveals the variety of occupations the Yard provided (see Map 2.1 and Table 2.3).

The most striking physical features of the Yard were: the basins, pounds, slips, docks and wharves, the vast timber stacks and the double rope house which almost bisected the Yard. The slips and basins were for building and repairing ships. The pounds held small boats and mast timbers, and the docks were for loading and unloading a multitude of vessels; war ships, transports and merchantmen bringing stores. The timber was laid out for seasoning and around the piles were the sawpits and kilns where the wood was converted and shaped. The ropehouse was associated with a variety of stores making up a complex that will receive close attention later. The Dock Yard was thus a cross between a dock for handling vast cargoes and an industrial site for building and repairing ships. These dual functions meant that the Yard had to contain many storehouses and all the trades associated with shipbuilding. Therefore, a sail loft, a rigging house and an extensive smithy were located in the Yard as well as workshops for dealing with boats' capstans and masts. To maintain and service these facilities the Yard employed masons, bricklayers, house carpenters, wheelwrights and teamsters.

The years covered by this study saw new techniques introduced into the Dock Yards, a process of modernization which was generally under the direction of one man, Brigadier General Sir Samuel Bentham, Inspector General of Naval Works.¹ Bentham's was a unique post created for him in 1796. He used it, until his dismissal in 1812, to bring the "Industrial

¹ M.S. Bentham. The Life of Brigadier General Sir Samuel Bentham (1862).

Revolution" to the Dock Yards. Under Bentham's supervision, new docks were dug, a mortar mill, a coppermill and iron mill and foundry, sawmills and a blockmill all constructed. Moreover, steam engines were introduced to power the new establishments. New technology meant that new crafts were brought to the Yard and new types of workers, millwrights, machinists and founders appear in the records. In addition some of the traditional occupations of the Yard were modernized; rope, sail and anchor making were all subject in some degree to new methods. A small measure of innovation was also made in shipwrighting.¹ (See Chronology)

The function of the dockyard was to build and maintain the ships of the Royal Navy. However, the way this task was fulfilled depended on the strategic plans of the Lords of the Admiralty. One of the major criticisms of the Dock Yards, aired by the great parliamentary enquiries into naval administration, was that too few vessels were built in the Dock Yards. But the Yards were fully occupied in trying to keep the fleets afloat and in fighting condition, often in the face of shortages of men and material.

In peacetime most of the Navy was laid up in ordinary. Unrigged and dismasted, the ships were securely anchored in the harbour's deep channels and creeks with only skeleton crews aboard. If maintained properly, these vessels still required a lot of attention but they were often neglected. It was estimated that it would take eighty shipwrights five to six weeks to put a seventy-four gun ship in a seaworthy condition from a state of ordinary.² During the war the ordinary was much reduced, its men and ships being put into regular service, though a reserve fleet was still maintained.

¹ R.G. Albion Forests and Sea Power (Cambridge Massachusetts 1926).

² PP 1806(312) V 415 Commission for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of His Majesty's Navy. Third Report p.292.

The expectation or outbreak of war, were marked by great exertions. Similarly the cessation of hostilities was accompanied by intense effort as ships were cleared and laid up.

Winters, when the fleets put in for refits, were especially busy, and when the cold season was spent in close blockade of the French ports, a great strain was put on the ships which eventually had to be made good. If a ship deteriorated so much that it needed a "great repair" it had to be virtually rebuilt.

"Repairs fell into two classes. A wooden warship was never finished: status quo could never be maintained for long, some timber or planking was constantly rotting or cracking, and the ship came back to the dockyard time and time again to be overhauled, ripped open and have the defective pieces replaced. Such was the regular repair duty of the yards - a constant burden in peace and war. Far more exciting were the extraordinary repairs necessary when a fleet put into port with masts and hulls shattered in action, calling for immediate attention so that the ships could be at sea again ahead of the enemy."¹

These were the features of naval warfare before Trafalgar. The year and a half immediately prior to that great battle were marked by hectic efforts to prepare ships to resist Napoleon's invasion attempt and to make good ravages that arose from a severe crisis in the supply of timber. When the imminent threat of French landings was over the function of the Navy changed. Great battle fleets were no longer required, instead, hundreds of vessels of all sizes were needed to maintain a constant blockade of continental Europe,² a burden which was added to by the American war and the increasing rapidity with which the ships rotted.

The relative importance of some of the Yard's different functions are demonstrated by some manpower figures for shipwrights.³ (See table 2.1)

¹ R.G. Albion op.cit. p.394

² For an assessment of the problems facing the Navy after Trafalgar see R. Glover 'The French Fleets 1807 - 1814. British Problems and Maddison's Opportunity'. Journal of Modern History 39. (1967) pp 233 - 52.

³ J. Fincham, 'A Statistical Account of the Isle of Portsea'. part II Royal Statistical Society Journal 16 (1853) pp 219 - 220.

Table 2.1 The distribution of shipwright's working hours by occupation.

	1791	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	1800	01	10	20
Shipbuilding	4	6	2	2	1	0.5	-	-	1	1	1	4	1
Repairing	60	60	61	60	56	52	57	54	55	54	56	65	65
Mastmaking	11	10	10	16	20	21	14	20	19	20	17	10	9
Boatmaking	12	9	16	11	11	15	16	14	13	14	15	6	7
Other houses and single stationed men	5	3	8	8	7	9	10	8	8	8	8	11	3

Expressed in terms of the percentage of the total manhours supplied by the Yard's shipwrights we can measure the importance of: shipbuilding, ship repairing, mast making, boat making and employment in other workshops and offices. Unfortunately this data is not available for the entire period but what there is demonstrates clearly that repairing vessels was the Yard's major task, added to which during wartime was increased mast and boat making. However the importance of building must not be underestimated. The construction of even one ship of the line was a notable industrial feat.

Some idea of what the building of a wooden warship meant in terms of material is given by the following figures, abstracted from Rees' Cyclopaedia of 1819-1820.

Table 2.2 An Estimate of the Weight of a 74 Gun Ship

Oak	47859 feet	1236 tons	208 pounds
Elm	462 "	7 "	1645 "
Fir	4397 "	67 "	517 "
Copper bolts etc.		20 "	1748 "
Iron knees etc.		28 "	2070 "
Lead		2 "	160 "
Pitch, Tar, Oakum, Paint, etc.		13 "	-
Firehearths		2 "	330 "
Copper-sheathing		1390 "	686 "
Masts, Yards, Booms and spaces		70 "	1820 "
Rigging		30 "	1120 "
Sails		13 "	1828 "
Cables, Hawsers, etc.		2 "	1120 "
Anchors		17 "	584 "
Blocks, pumps and boats		27 "	560 "

Timber was, of course, the material of which the greatest quantity was used. Of that, oak was the most important. It was used in the main for the ribs of frames, accounting for 75% of the wood used in the hull, and for planking which accounted for 10%.¹ For the stem, stern and futtocks, curved or compass timber was required; oak from southern England was considered best for this. The decks and strakes, planks, above the waterline, were of Baltic oak. Beech was utilised in the filling between the frames and for the ceiling, that is the planks on the interior of the ship's sides. It was also used with elm for the strakes below water and for the false keel which protected the keel of elm. Elm was also used for the keelson into which the frames were built. The masts and spars were made from fir, spruce and pine brought from North America, Scandinavia and Scotland. A tropical hardwood, lignum vitae was used with elm to make pulleys and blocks, very important pieces of the ship's machinery, being some of its relatively few moving parts. In a single year 130,000 blocks were manufactured at Portsmouth.²

Other imports used included tar and hemp from the Baltic for ropes and for caulking. Considerable amounts of metal were also used, particularly copper which was needed to sheath the ship's bottom in order to protect it from the worm. The stimulus the navy gave to the national economy is beyond calculation, especially as wooden fleets required constant repair and replacement.

The heavy consumption of timber during the eighteenth century meant that by the time of the great maritime wars between 1793 and 1815, Britain's vessels were being built of inferior material and needed frequent attention.

¹ A. Holland Ships of British Oak (1971) pp 29-45.

² K.R. Gilbert Portsmouth's Blockmaking Machinery (1965).

The form in which timber was delivered to the yard varied, and so did the nature and amount of processing that it had to undergo. Danzig deals (planks) were delivered fully converted. This was because the introduction of powered sawing on the Continent had made it cheaper to buy the thinner planking already prepared. In England opposition from workers to sawmills meant that labour costs were high. The different purposes to which the timber was put also determined what was done to it. These processes will be dealt with as they arise. Much of the dockyard's space and time was given over to the handling and storing of timber. Large areas had to be reserved for stacking it for seasoning. This was done in berths paved with flat stones inclined to a water course and strewn with ashes from the smith's fires so as to prevent the growth of weeds.¹ In fact, the preservation of wood was a major problem and the Navy was increasingly forced to build with green timber. The method of storage in the open did not help. In 1812 it was ordered that the wood piled on the slipside of a ship being built should be covered with a temporary roof.² Even when in frame, a vessel was subject to the ravages of the weather, and in 1814 it was decided that in future sheds should be built to house ships under construction. During the same year "a Gentleman of Scientific Eminence" ~~*,~~ Mr. Sowerby, had been consulted about the problem of dry rot. He recommended that a hydrometer should be used to detect damp.³ Another problem was that building ships in wood required timber of a certain natural curvature. This became critical with the larger vessels and their

¹ J. Knowles An Inquiry into the means which have been taken to preserve the British Navy (1821).

² N.M.M. POR/A/56 27.10.1812.

³ Perhaps ~~x~~ James Sowerby 1757 - 1822. Naturalist and Artist, and an expert on fungi. Dictionary of National Biography. N.M.M. POR/A/58 15.12.1814.

construction was sometimes delayed for want of it. One answer was the use of iron knees, the L-shaped timbers supporting the decks; another was to try new ways of joining pieces of wood to make up the required shape.¹ Modifications in the form of the hull were also tried; in fact it has been said,

"Practically all the innovations in British naval architecture during this period were occasioned by inadequate supply of timber."²

To a large extent the pace of wooden warship construction was determined by nature. Besides the delay over timber and the need to allow a vessel to stand in frame for long periods to season, tides were important, for they determined when a ship could be launched. If she was not ready, weeks might pass before there was another opportunity. Once afloat, there was much work to be done, as the ship was still virtually a hulk. Ropes, sails and iron chains were still needed to make a masted ship into a working machine.

Overall direction of the Naval service was vested in the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty who operated as a board. Not of necessity professional seamen, their duties were:

"To consider and determine upon all matters relative to Your Majesty's Navy and Departments there unto belonging; to give directions for the performance of all Services that may be required in the Civil or Naval branches there of; to sign by themselves or their secretaries all orders necessary for carrying into execution and generally to supervise and direct the whole navy and marine establishment of Great Britain."³

The Navy Board was nominally inferior to the Admiralty, though the exact relationship depended on the individuals who filled the various

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/48 27.2.1806.

² R.G. Albion op.cit.

³ P.P. 1806 (309) VII Commission to enquire into Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments in Public Offices. Third Report pp 108-9.

positions in the two boards. The Navy Board was responsible for naval administration and the day-to-day civil affairs; the Dock Yards were under its authority. The three senior officers were, the Treasurer, the Comptroller and the Surveyor of the Navy. The last had the greatest contact with the Yards, as he was responsible for the building and repair of ships. Both the Admiralty and Navy Board made periodic inspections of the Dock Yards. In times of crisis a number of Commissioners could be sent to each Yard to achieve more immediate supervision. In 1792 a committee of the Admiralty was apparently in Portsmouth reviewing the efficiency of the Yard and there will be occasion to note other official visits. Though the Navy Board gave the Dock Yard officers their orders it was the Admiralty that appointed them and disciplined them, occasionally by-passing both Navy Board and Resident Commissioner in their dealings with the officers.

One Navy Board Commissioner was resident in each Dock Yard. He was the immediate link between the Boards in London, with overall local responsibility, except for the Rope Yard where the executive officer was the Clerk of the Rope Yard.

The post of Resident Commissioner was usually filled by a Naval captain, who, it was understood, ~~has~~ surrendered any expectation of future active service or promotion by accepting a civil position. Two men filled this office in the period of interest here.

Sir Charles Saxton, Resident Commissioner from 1790 to 1806, was born in 1732.¹ After an unremarkable naval career Saxton was on half pay in 1783 and saw no further active service. He was made a baronet in 1794.

¹ Naval Chronicle Vol.20 (1808) pp 425-429.

It was said of Saxton that he, "...enjoyed an exalted reputation for ability for an attentive diligence to the duties of his office, and for an unimpeachable integrity of conduct." However, Saxton may have lacked a certain polish. The diarist Elizabeth Wynne noted that he was "More like a Boatswain than a Gentleman" and kept only a shabby establishment.¹ Sir George Grey, who succeeded Saxton as Commissioner, was probably a rather more sophisticated character. The fourth son of Earl Grey, he was born in 1767 and saw considerable service under Sir John Jarvis, later Earl St. Vincent.² Appointed a Navy Board Commissioner under St. Vincent's administration of the Admiralty, Grey had five years experience in the Dock Yards when he came to Portsmouth. Made a baronet in 1814, Grey was married to Samuel Whitbread's sister. Whitbread was already married to Grey's sister. George Grey's brother was Charles Grey, the Whig leader.³

Only a brief outline of the duties of the various dockyard officers can be given here, for neither their respective spheres of authority nor ranks were entirely clear.

"...those officers had formed very different conceptions of their duties ... Indeed it has been observed by some of themselves that an officer who had served half his life in one dockyard, if removed to another would find himself nearly as much at a loss to know his precise duty as if he had never been in the service..⁴"

¹ A. Freemantle op.cit. pp 88, 194.

² J. Charnock Biographia Navalis Vol.II 1794-8 p.82.

³ Ibid.

⁴ P.P. 1806 (92) V.245 Commission for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of His Majesty's Navy, Second Report p.4.

Officially the Principal Officers were supposed to be equal, but the Master Shipwright or Builder, whose post was the oldest in the Dock Yard service, was second in status and authority only to the Resident Commissioner. The incumbent of the Master's Office was also the Yard's most important technical officer and the only one to be promoted exclusively from within the dockyard organization. He was responsible to the Surveyor of the Navy for about 80% of all manufacturing activity. Not only did the Builder direct work on ships, he was also in charge of the yard's buildings, wharves and timber supplies. In addition, the Master Boatbuilder, Mastmaker and Foreman of Caulkers answered to him and he oversaw the smiths, joiners, house carpenters, bricklayers, painters, wheelwrights and sawyers. Two assistants and a clerical staff aided the Master Shipwright. An important subordinate was the Boatswain of the yard who was in charge of the unskilled labourers and the equipment for moving heavy stores. His men played a vital role in the shipwright's work, erecting shoring and carrying heavy timbers. Also responsible to the Builder and his assistants were the Foreman of the Yard, the Foreman of New Work and the Foreman Afloat; much repair work took place aboard the ships at Spithead.

The maintenance of the harbour and moorings, the manouvering of ships and their docking and undocking, the manufacturing of sails and rigging were the responsibility of the Master Attendants. Like the Boatswain, the Attendants were recruited from the most senior officers of their rank on active service; they were under the authority of the Surveyor, ~~and~~ Portsmouth, because of its size, had two. One of their major tasks for which they had a large work force under Superintending Masters, was the upkeep of the ships in ordinary.

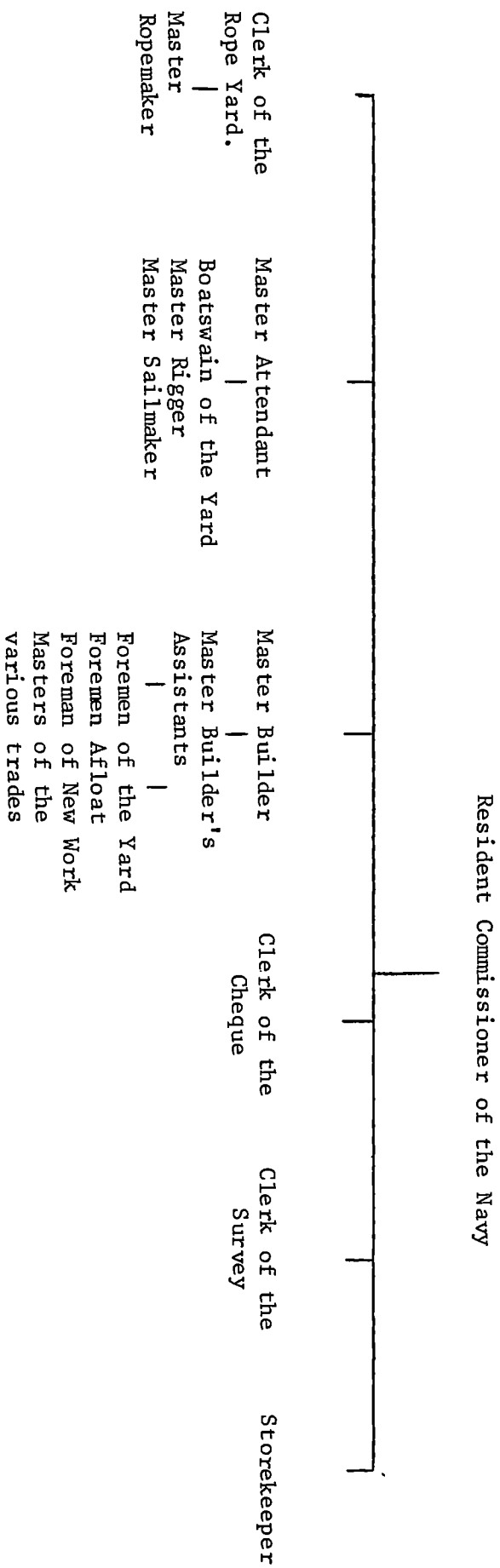


Diagram 2.1

A schematic Representation of Dock Yard Administration showing the Principal Officers and their immediate subordinates.

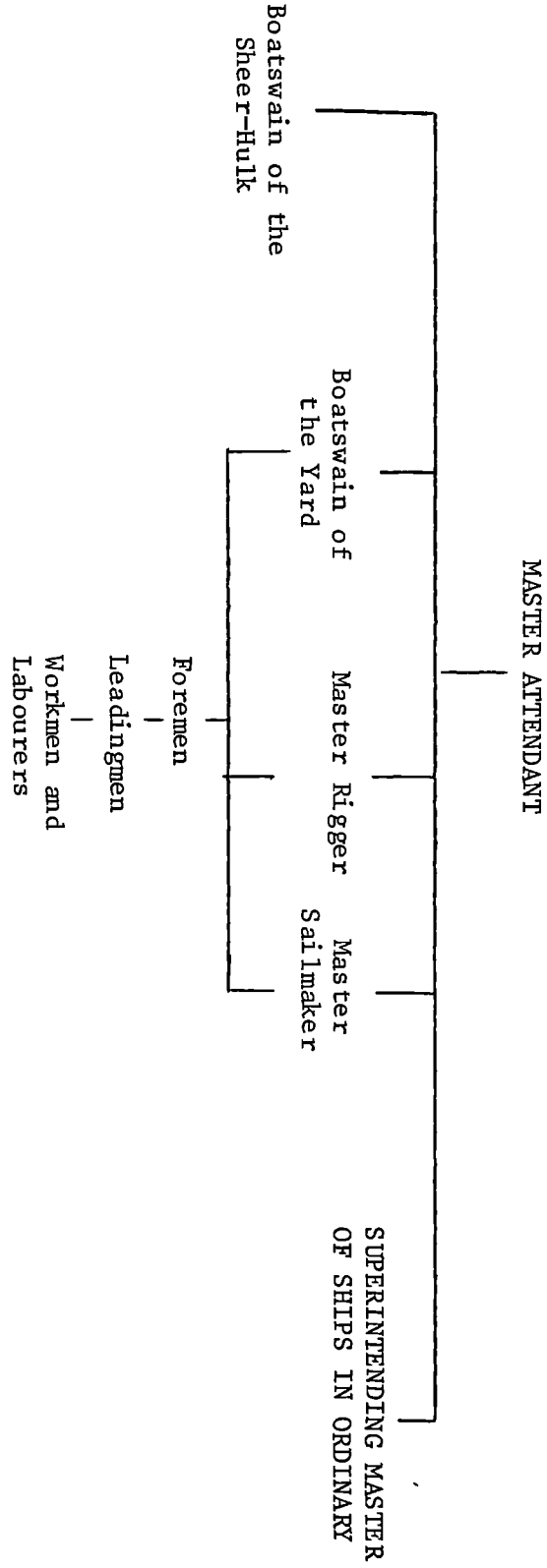


Diagram 2.2 A Schematic Representation of the lines of authority in the Master Attendant's department.

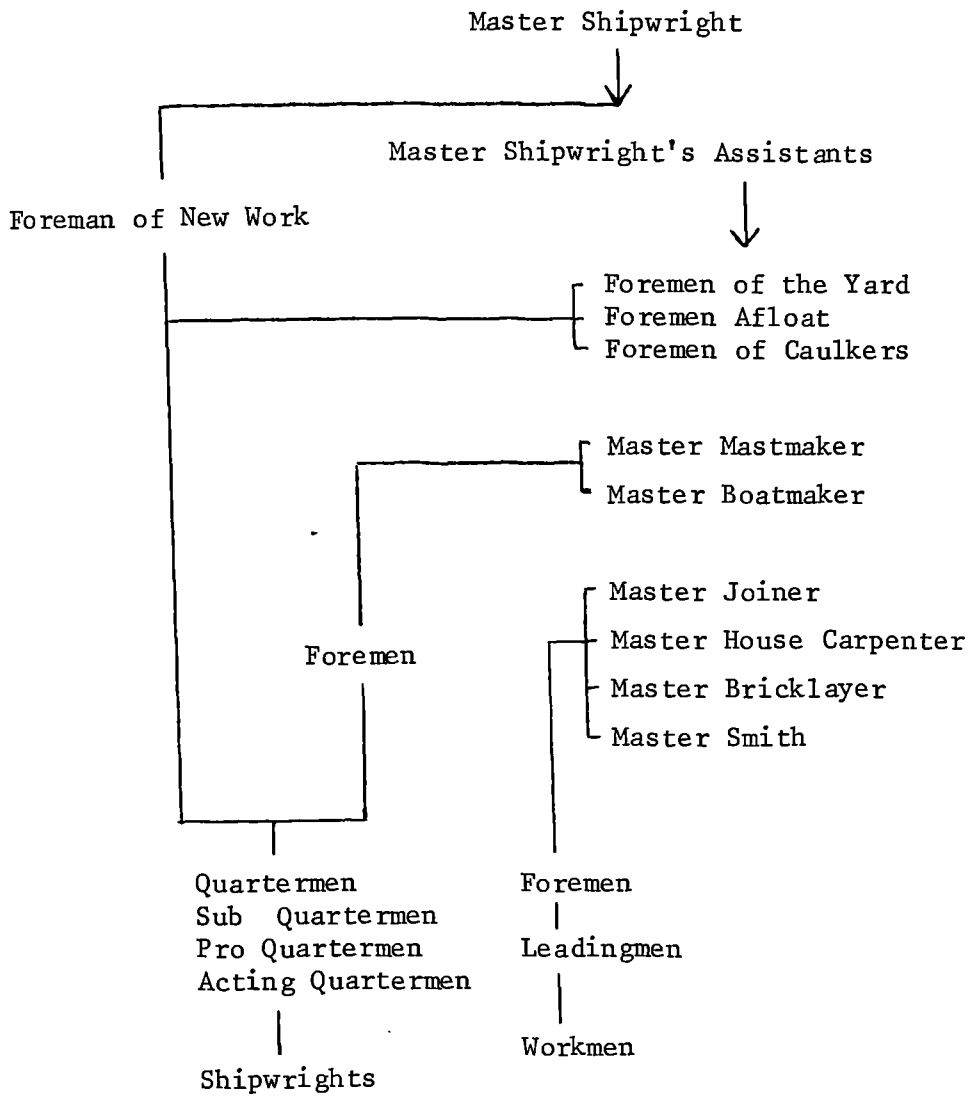


Diagram 2.3

A schematic representation of the lines of authority in the Master Shipwright's department.

Cooperation between all the officers was essential, as a number of the yard's functions required close coordination, particularly the delicate jobs of docking, undocking and launching of vessels, which employed large numbers of workmen.

The most important administrative officer in the yard was the Clerk of the Cheque. His duties were multivarious. The yard's financial officer, his staff collected the figures of work done and made up the wages lists; they also had to muster the workmen. The Clerk of the Cheque had similar duties with regard to naval personnel.

Control of the yard's stores was vested in the Clerk of the Survey, though, like any other officer, he could not issue or receive stores on his own authority. The detailed administration of stores was in the hands of the Storekeeper who had a staff of labourers and was also responsible for the security of the storehouses. Stores were issued from these to the formen and quartermen of the gangs who required them and who produced a note signed by the proper officers. The items were then held in a cabin until needed, being looked after and issued by the cabinkeepers who were appointed by the Builder and Master Attendants.¹

Below the Principal Officers were a host of inferior Officers of varying rank, ranging from the Master Shipwright's Assistants, senior foremen of shipwrights and master tradesmen to leadingmen of labourers. In fact, one of the most striking features of Yard administration was the length of the chain of command and the proliferation of subordinate posts (see Diagrams 2.2 and 2.3).² As many junior positions were filled

¹ Besides the above Parliamentary Papers see D. Baugh Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole (Princeton 1965). R. Knight 'The Royal Dockyards in England at the time of the American War of Independence' (London Univ. Ph.D. thesis 1972).

² PP 1806(92) V 245 op.cit.

by men recruited from the Yard workforce there were plenty of opportunities for "deserving" men to obtain a limited degree of promotion. The inferior officers were a mixed group, varying in status and authority, as can be shown by listing them.

A list of Inferior Officers of the Dock Yard

Assistants to Master Shipwrights
Foremen of the Yard
Foremen of Caulkers
Foremen Afloat
 Quartermen of Caulkers
Master Mastmaker
 Quartermen of Caulkers
Master Boatbuilder
 Foremen of Boatbuilders
 Quartermen of Boatbuilders
Master Joiners
Master House Carpenters
 Foremen of Joiners and House Carpenters
Master Smiths
 Foremen of Smiths
Master Bricklayer
 Foremen of Masons and Bricklayers
 Boatswain of the Yard
 Foremen of Scavellers
 Foremen of Labourers
 Foremen of Teams
Superintending Masters
Master Sailmakers
 Foremen of Sailmakers
Master Rigger
 Foremen of Riggers
Boatswains of the Sheer Hulk
 Cabin Keepers
Foremen of Storekeepers' Labourers
Master Ropemakers
 Foremen of Ropemakers, and Line and Twine Spinners
Warden
Warders
 Rounders and Watchmen
 Surgeons
 Assistant Surgeon
 Chaplain

The most senior officers on this list have been indicated by underlining, but the range of status is shown by the fact that rounders and watchmen, who were shipwrights and labourers doing security duties on a

part-time basis are classified with the Yard Chaplain, an Anglican pluralist.¹ It is impossible to detail the duties and responsibilities of all the inferior offices; therefore we will give closer attention to the most numerous class of junior office, the Quartermen.

There was approximately one Quartermen to every fifteen qualified shipwrights.² This ratio reflects the fact that normally Quartermen led a gang of about twenty men and apprentices. Some, however, had office duties. The Quartermen with a gang was responsible for supervising the workmen, particularly the apprentices, and keeping accounts of stores drawn and work done. He also had to attend morning and evening musters and report injuries among his gang.³ Quartermen were also given duties that took them out of the Yard. They were, for instance, employed to survey standing timber in the forests.⁴ In short the Quartermen were key members of the Yard administration and they were trained in their duties through promotion from shipwright to the rank of sub-Quartermen to Pro Quartermen to full Quartermen. Pro and Sub Quartermen were used for duties away from a gang or to replace temporarily a Quartermen who was absent from his gang. A well qualified young shipwright might hope first to be appointed to oversee the construction of a naval vessel built in a contractor's yard and then, on his return to the yard to be appointed a Sub-Quartermen.⁵ Without tracing the careers of individuals it is impossible to discover the rate of ^{promotion and the} normal ceiling of promotion. However, we can make several general observations. The promotion structure of the

¹ See below p.

² NMM ADM/BP/13 - 36b

³ PP. 1806 (312) V 415 op.cit.

⁴ NNM POR/A/45 6.12.1802

⁵ NNM POR/A/49 20.1.1806

Dock Yard encompassed all the Yards in Britain and abroad so that a man might be transferred in order to achieve a higher rank. Secondly, access to the highest offices, particularly among the shipwrights, was probably fairly limited. The Master shipwright would take indentured servants for a fee. These boys' education, general and technical, marked them out for promotion to the senior Foremen's position and the Assistantships to the Master Shipwright, from which they might aspire to the rank of Principal Officer and even a seat on the Navy Board. For many shipwrights, however, the limit of their ambition must have been the Quartermaster's rank.

The measure of the difference in status between Quartermen and Shipwrights is difficult to take. It may be suspected that it was not too great. Until 1804 the Quartermen were not salaried, their *earnings* being based on those of their gangs. The risk of collusion between the shipwrights and the Quartermen led to the recommendation that the Quartermen be given salaries.¹ Whether this changed the relationship between the Quartermen and their subordinates is impossible to say, but it may be doubted. As late as 1859 a parliamentary enquiry reported that there was not enough social distinction between the junior officers and the Yard workmen.

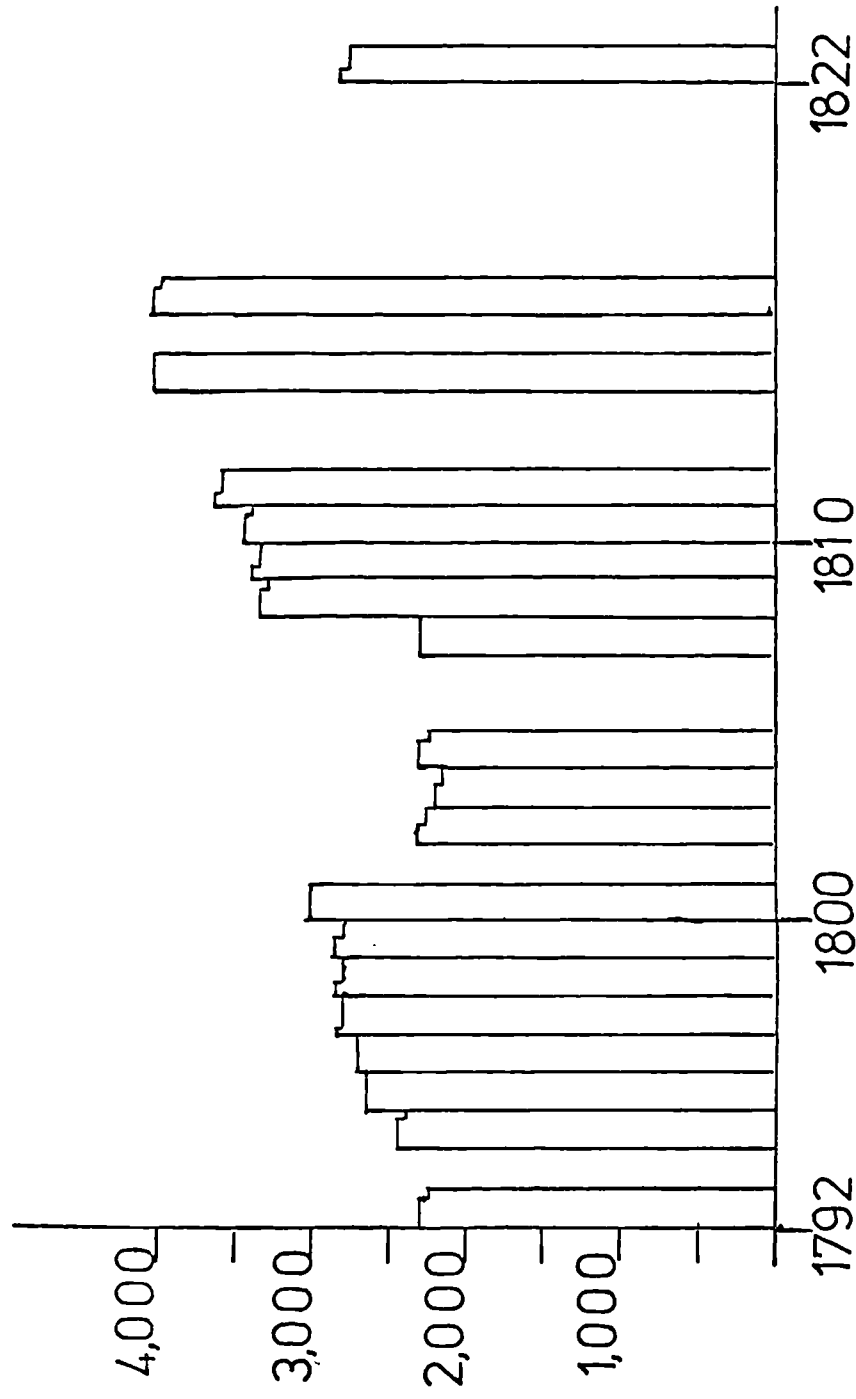
"It should be more distinctly drawn than hitherto, in the same manner as a line is drawn in the Navy and in the Army between commissioned and non commissioned officers."²

The enquiry did, however, go on to remark that the old class of Quartermen had been respected by their subordinates.³

¹ PP. 1803-04 (83) III Commission to Enquire into Frauds Etc. in His Majesty's Navy. Sixth Report.

² PP. 1859 XXIII (15) 15 Committee of Inquiry into various matters relating to the Efficiency and Economy of His Majesty's Dock Yards.

³ Ibid.



Graph 2.1

The number of men employed in the Dock Yard

Generally, it would seem that inclusion in the Yard management of many workmen had the effect of diffusing managerial skills and responsibility fairly widely, without causing a division between those in management positions and their subordinates. This was especially true of the shipwrights for whom, as we shall see below, there were very many roles in the Yard administration.

Fairly detailed, though not complete, information can be obtained about the number of workmen employed in the Dock Yard.¹ (See Graph 2.1) The figures presented here are for Yard artificers and labourers only. There were in addition several hundred labourers and seamen in and about the Yard manning the ships in ordinary. These figures show a general trend for the number of workmen to rise during the war with a marked reversal during the Peace of Amiens. However, they do not reveal short-term fluctuations. From the quarterly figures, from which the annual series is derived, it would appear that there was a slight tendency for the number of workmen to rise during winter. This trend probably reflects the repair work which had to be done after a summer's campaigning and the damage done by winter gales, together with the shortness of the days in which the work had to be done. The Yard officers spoke of "... the pressure of work which invariable attends this port during the winter season."²

Late summer and autumn brought their own problems as imported stores arrived and had to be unloaded and housed.³ Additional labour was sometimes needed and troops were used when civilians could not be hired.⁴ Similar arrangements were made to cope with more exceptional events such as laying up a captured fleet.⁵ Extra skilled labour was

1 NMM ADM/BP/12 to 36b
 2 NMM POR/D/28 21.11.1800
 3 NMM POR/F/28 10.8.1807
 4 NMM POR/D/28 7.9.1810
 5 NMM POR/A/50 2.10.1807

Table 2.3 The War Establishment of Portsmouth Dock Yard
as laid down in 1803.

Shipwrights	900
Caulkers	140
Oakum boys	45
Joiners	70
House Carpenters	100
Wheelwrights	3
Plumbers	3
Pitchheaters	2
Bricklayers	30
Bricklayers Labourers	30
Sailmakers	60
Scavellmen	80
Riggers	90
Riggers Labourers	45
Labourers	350
Blockmakers	4
Founder	1
Painters	36
Brazier	1
Cooper	1
Locksmiths	3
Teams	25
Sawyers	140
Oar maker	1
Masons	2
Smiths	100
Ropelayers	4
Ropemakers	200
Ropemakers Labourers	66
Boys	50
Line and Twine Spinners	12
Hemp dressers	18
Wheelboys	16
<hr/>	
Total	2764

sometimes obtained from the artificers of the Navy, the carpenters and caulkers who served afloat.¹ Usually, however, most of the Yards' labour force appears to have been recruited on a permanent or long-term basis. Many of the skilled workmen were entered as apprentices and trained in the Yard. The Navy Board was careful to check the indentures of the craftsmen it recruited from outside the service.²

The general composition of the Dock Yard labour force can be determined by reference to a list of its establishment as laid down by the Navy Board, though the actual numbers of workmen rarely corresponded to the official ones.³ (Table 2.3) The dominance of the shipwrights is quite clear and it can be seen that the workforce was dominated by craftsmen. The skill involved in these crafts and the relationship between each occupational group is considered below.

The organization of its armed forces provided eighteenth century government with its most complex and far reaching administrative task. The maintenance of the army and the navy gave to the Government great economic and political power and for this reason Parliament watched with jealousy the expenditure on the armed services. While the Navy was not regarded as a threat to liberty, as was a standing army, the enormous cost and complexity of servicing the fleets in the Dock Yards did cause concern. This is not the place to try to detail the interconnection between eighteenth century political and administrative history, or to describe the deficiencies of naval administration. However, some consideration must be given to a number of Parliamentary inquiries that took place during this period as they are one of the basic sources for this study.

¹ NMM POR/F/22 19.10.1796

² NMM POR/C/23 4.1.1793

³ NMM Prescott Frost Papers.

As part of the general overhaul of administration and the policy of retrenchment following on the defeats in America, the Government promised, in 1792, a full investigation of all departments of the Navy. In the King's speech the Government pledged itself to a reduction of naval expenditure. However, the outbreak of war ended hopes of economical reform and at the same time added to the administrative burdens of the Government. The Navy's finances sank into ever greater chaos. Therefore, when a Select Committee was set up to investigate public finances in 1797, the Dock Yards were given careful attention. The Committee was chaired by Sir Charles Abbot who was privately briefed by his step-brother, Samuel Bentham. Prompted by Bentham, the Committee called for the report on naval administration promised in 1792. Bentham drew up a plan for reforming the Dock Yards which was finally sanctioned by the new Administration in 1801.¹

The new First Lord, St. Vincent, had fixed ideas about the maladministration of the Yards and he instigated an investigation, resulting in the Government setting up an "Inquiry into Irregularities, Frauds and Abuses practised in the Naval Departments."² All of these events took place in a context of political rivalry and intense personal hostility, neither Bentham nor St. Vincent being men of tact. The hasty demobilisation of 1801 - 03 and St. Vincent's quarrels with his subordinates on the Navy Board and the timber contractors led to strong criticism of the administration as a whole. When Pitt returned to office he appointed Melville as First Lord of the Admiralty and suspended the Commission of Inquiry; not,

¹ M.S. Bentham op.cit. pp 137-176.

² PP 1803-04 (83) III op.cit.
 PP 1806 (1) II Commission to Enquire into Frauds, etc. in His Majesty's Navy. Ninth Report.
 D. Bonner Smith op.cit.
 W. James Old Oak (1950).
 O.A. Sherrard The Life of Lord St. Vincent (1933).
 E. Beckerman Nelson's Dear Lord (1967).

however, before its tenth report was published. In this report the Commission made some serious allegations against Melville's handling of Naval funds when he had been Treasurer of the Navy. Melville was forced to resign and was impeached. His replacement was his advisor, the experienced, but aged, Lord Barham. Barham replaced the Commission of Inquiry by a "Commission for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of the Navy".¹ This committee, though it lacked the inquisitorial nature of St. Vincent's Commission, reviewed previous inquiries into the Navy and their results, recommending further reforms. Many of the Administrative changes referred to below were initiated by Barham's Board of Revision which operated from 1806 to 1809 (see Chronology).

It is not possible to give more than a sketch of the parliamentary aspects of naval administration during this period. Many of the events involved are not clear, and published accounts of them are sometimes contradictory. One thing, however, is apparent and that is that attempts to reform the Navy created great hostility, arousing much bitterness and becoming the tool of politicians seeking power.² The interplay between administrators, technical experts and politicians is likely to prove a fascinating and revealing topic when it is examined. Here, let us merely note the ambiguity, and complexity which managed to make many levels of naval administration, from the relationship among and between the Commissioners of the Admiralty and the Navy to the measurement and payment of work, very confused.

¹ PP 1806 (8) V.1. First Report of the Commission for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of the Navy.

² T.S. Tucker Memoirs of Admiral Earl St. Vincent (1844)
 H. Ziegeler Addington (1965)
Memoirs of the Board of Admiralty under the Presidency of the Earl St. Vincent in D. Bonner-Smith op.cit.
 E.P. Breton Life and Correspondence of John Earl St. Vincent (1838)
 Jeffrey A Key to the Papers Presented to the House of Common (1806)

Conditions of work

Under the general heading of conditions of work are included: hours, wages, incomes, discipline, the actual nature of the work done and the skill and hardship involved in that work. The complexity that arises from considering so many aspects of a working man's life at once is made even greater when dealing with the Dock Yard because of the very many occupational groups employed there. Moreover, it seems impossible artificially to separate these subjects; for they comprise a set of interlocking experiences which the shipwrights or Yard labourers would have known as a whole. To consider what a man earned apart from how he earned it cannot be justified, if it is wished to understand that man and his view of his work.

As the shipbuilding industry has been relatively neglected by historians of the Industrial Revolution, and as it is important to understand in the fullest possible detail a man's craft, considerable attention is given to the technical aspects of shipbuilding and its ancillary trades. For the sake of greater clarity illustrations have been used to supplement the text.

To place the Dock Yard in a more general context frequent reference will be made to civilian shipbuilding. Yet, it has been impossible to do full justice to a very complex subject. The intricacies and finer mysteries of many of the crafts and occupations dealt with have been missed; many have probably disappeared for ever. In undertaking this study it has been assumed that all occupations have something in them to be respected, even if it is but strength and patience, and that the repeated experience of an every-day occupation had an important influence in defining men's attitudes and shaping their actions. What is described here, was the greater part of the Yard workmen's lives. Thus this chapter is the essential background to later consideration of the Dock Yard workers as

political citizens, labour organizers and thieves. The organization of this section mainly follows occupational lines. The shipwrights are our first subject, followed by an examination of each of the other groups of craftsmen. The unskilled or semi-skilled workers come next. Then we consider issues such as hours, earnings and work discipline, which were of general concern to the Yard work-force as a whole.

The Shipwrights

An angry critic of the Navy's civil administration wrote: "The only two posts that ~~a~~ dockyard apprentices and labourers may not aspire to fill are those of Chaplain and Staff Surgeon.¹ With regard to one group of workmen, there is some truth in this as well as exaggeration. The ubiquity of the shipwrights can be best shown by listing some of the posts that they could hold. Exclusive of the positions of Superior Officers, these were: the Foreman of the Yard, the Foreman Afloat, timber measurer, sawyers' measurer, the master of the horse, timber converter and purveyor and the full, pro and sub quartermen. Other jobs done by the shipwrights were those of cabinkeepers, solid makers, mould makers. Also, sorting and issuing slabs of wood, making wedges, supervising the manufacture of treenails, sorting and marking copper, maintaining and making pumps and assisting the timber master. Further, they filled many clerical posts, keeping account of iron work done in the smithy, writing job and task notes and doing other clerical jobs in the cabins of the Yard Officers. Such duties could involve considerable numbers of men. For instance, twenty five shipwrights were occupied in measuring and keeping an account

¹ P. Barry Dock Yard Economy and Naval Power London (1863)

of the work done by the sawyers.¹ But most of the artificers were working out of doors in gangs, or in workshops. The gangs of twenty were employed either afloat repairing ships, or at the dockside and building slips. The men in the workshops made masts and their tops, capstans and boats. It is therefore clear that the working conditions experienced by the shipwrights varied considerably just as their wages did. As the central task of the Yard was building and repairing ships, it would be best to look first at the gangs working on the dockside and afloat.

Shipwrights' Gangs

The gang or company was an important feature of the system under which the shipwrights worked. In the Dock Yard the company consisted of twenty men and apprentices led by a Quartermaster. Unlike civilian gangs the quartermaster was not chosen by the gang nor was the gang self-recruited.² Each year the naval companies were shoaled, that is they were dissolved and reselected by the quartermasters who were appointed by the Navy Board. As the earnings of each man depended on the efforts of his gang as a whole, the selection of workmates was a matter of great concern. As small, closely knit units, these companies probably had an important social role. It would be revealing to know if they were formed along

¹ P.P. 1806 (312) V 415 op.cit.
 NMM POR/D/29 1.10.1811
 " " /A/45 21.5.1803
 " " /A/45 15.12.1803

² S. Pollard 'The Economic History of British Shipbuilding 1870-1914' (London Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1951)
 idem 'The Decline of Shipbuilding on the Thames' Econ Hist Review III (1951) pp 72 - 86.
 PP. 1813-14 (115) VIII.1. Select Committee on East India built ships.
 PP. 1806 (312) V.415 op.cit. p.200.

family lines, whether the social relationships that were based on them added to the shipwrights' social cohesiveness and whether they were the foundation of trade union and co-operative activity. All that can be done here is to remember that many workmen had their sons with them in the Yard. As far as the Navy Board was concerned, the sins of individuals could be visited on the heads of entire gangs. In cases of neglect or careless workmanship this was inevitable. As the gang worked so closely together it would have been difficult to apportion blame.

The shoalling of the shipwrights each year was criticised on the grounds that it reduced productivity by mixing all the workmen together so that good and bad workmen were in the same gangs. In the merchant yards the men shoaled themselves according to the job to be done and to their ability. The Navy Board claimed that more work was done by mixing the men, as it enabled the better workers to help the less able and also encouraged the latter by increasing their wages. Most of the Yard officers were of this opinion. One of the points they made was that mixed gangs were easier to control than those based on a classification of workers by merit. The Master Shipwright at Chatham, Robert Seppings, wrote, "... in general, good workmen are more correct in their moral conduct than the indifferent." It was also pointed out that some division of the men by ability took place already, in that the companies were divided into those that worked task and those that worked day. The task gangs, those working at piece rates, building vessels, were permanent and formed from the best workmen. Portsmouth had four task gangs who, besides doing new work, did large scale repairs and worked in the mast-house. However, both the Commission of Enquiry and the Commission of Revision concluded that the workmen should be divided into three classes. The latter also advised that this should not be attempted during the

pressure of war, which suggests that the authorities either feared some resistance from the men or administrative confusion.¹

Shipbuilding

From the laying of the keel to the launching and fitting out, a wooden ship was in the hands of the shipwrights. Nearly the whole working of the Yard was geared to their activities. Only the ropemakers, riggers and sailmakers could set their own pace, or rather have it set for them by circumstances independent of the shipwrights' pace. A schema of the method of building a wooden ship will illustrate this (see Illustration 2.4 and Diagram 2.4).

First, the shipwrights had to lay blocks, capped with oak, at a carefully measured angle down the slip way, or in a dry dock. On these, the pieces of the keel (a) were assembled, the scarfs, that is the joints, being lined with tarred flannel and held together by coaks (see Illustration 2.5). The keel was then rabbetted to take the garboard strake; or, to put it plainly, a groove was cut along either side of the keel to take the bottom-most planks (see Diagram 2.5). The keel was then straightened, 'faired', and held in place by treenails driven into the blocks.

Next the stem, rising at the bow, was built up and the timbers associated with it, that is, the deadwood, stemson and apron, (b) fixed. On the stem, marks were made from the moulds which served as a guide for further construction. The stern post (c) was fitted, which had to be done with case, as the lower planks of the ship's bottom were fitted to it. Also it had to take the weight of the rudder. The stern post was

¹ PP. 1806 (312) V.415 op.cit. p.200, which contains a long discussion and much correspondence on this subject.

therefore supported and strengthened by other timbers, deadwood (d). Both stem and stern had to be shored up (see Illustration 2.6). In this, and the raising and fitting of these parts of the vessel, the shipwrights had the assistance of the scavelmen and Yard labourers and teams of horses, for it was a very strenuous business, taking several days. The transom (e) and fashion pieces (f) which formed the stern were fitted with great care.

A vital step in the operation was the laying of the first parts of the frame at right angles to the keel. These were the floor timbers (g): " ... the truth and precision of the fabric may be said to depend upon the accuracy of the floors .."¹. On to the end of these, carrying the shape of the frame upwards, were joined the first of the futtocks (h). "They are raised into their places by sheers and tackles and great care should be taken that the frame be not strained in hoisting, as its form would be altered, and of consequence the true shape of the body lost."² The shape was retained by timbers nailed the length of the vessel called ribbands (i). The forming of the bows was then completed and the first planking done upon it. When the stern frame was completed the filling timbers placed and the keelson fitted, the frame was trimmed to its final size and the whole ship stood in frame. The keelson lay above the keel and locked the frames into place. The vessel now began to take shape and the sides were made more substantial as the filling timbers were raised between the frames (see Illustration 2.4). "If we compare the carcass of a ship to the skeleton of the human body, the keel may be considered as the backbone, and the timbers as the ribs."³ (See

¹ A. Rees. The Cyclopaedia or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature 32 (1819-20).

² Ibid.

³ W. Falconer. An Universal Dictionary of the Marine (1780). For the technicalities of Wooden Shipbuilding see over. Albion op.cit. Holland op.cit. C. Nepean Longridge The Anatomy of Nelson's ships (1955). C. Singer and others A History of Technology IV (1962).

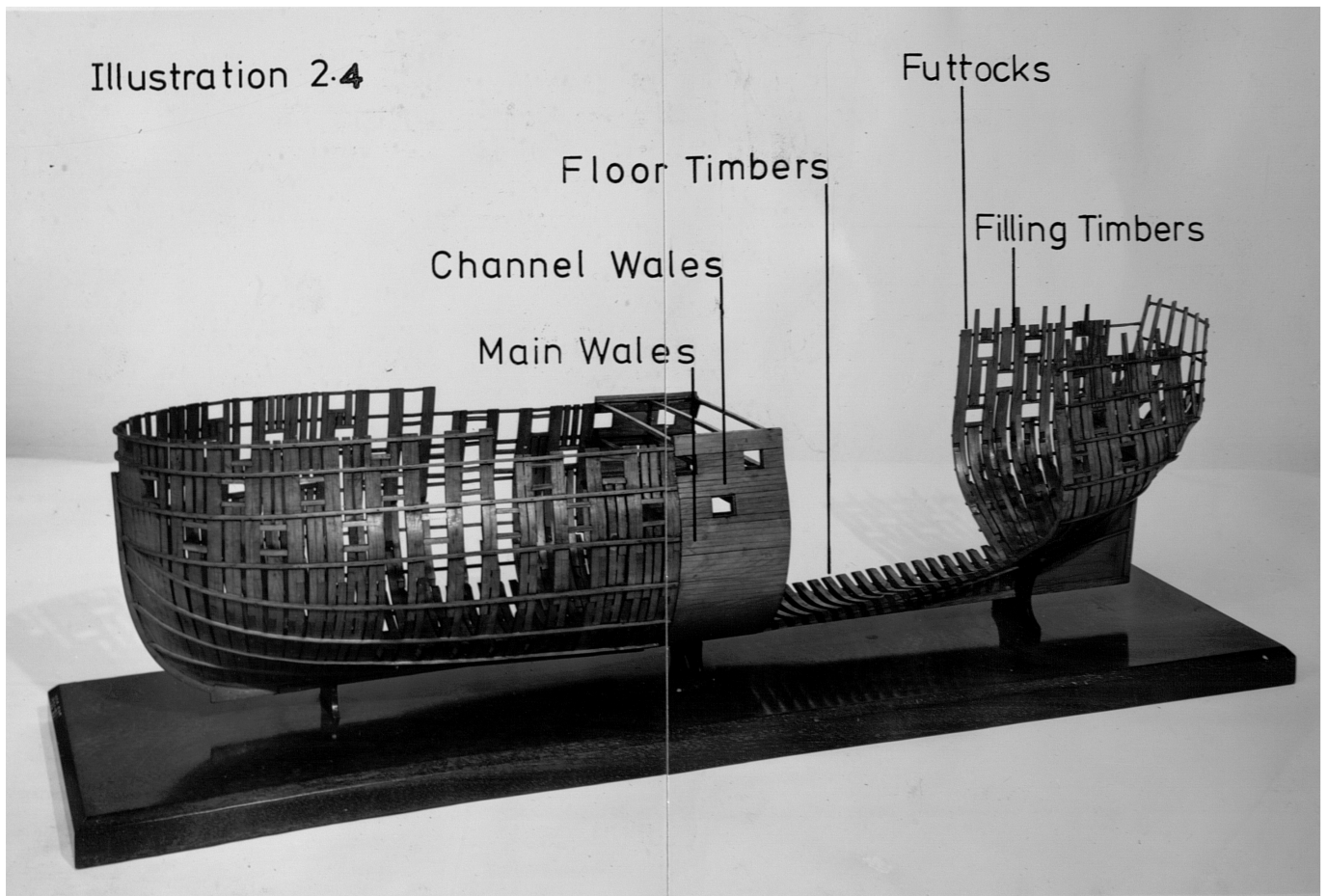
Diagram 2.5). The whole was held and braced in scaffolding which also supported working platforms. Many injuries and even deaths resulted from either falling from the scaffolding and high parts of the ship, or from materials and tools being dropped from above.

The main-wales (j), extra thick and strong planks encircling the ship about halfway up the sides, were the first part of the vessel's skin to be put on. Then the bottom was planked. The first deck to be built was the lowest, the orlop deck (h). Fitting this, and its associated timbers, was the most laborious part of the shipwright's work. Next, more outside planking was done, the channel wales, then the middle deck was fitted (k). Further planking was secured and the upper deck (m) was built in. As each deck was built the ports were cut. The upper deck fittings, necessary for the working of the ship, were fixed, and then the quarterdeck and forecastle. The upper works were completed by the construction of the round house and poop deck. The interior fittings were next finished, the deck planking, the ceiling, (n), that is the "thick stuff" on the sides of the ship, then the supports for the masts and the bow sprit. Bulkheads and storerooms with all necessary gratings, hatches and ladders were erected.¹ Ideally, the vessel would be left to season for periods during its construction. Indeed, some vessels stood for so long that their timber rotted.

Before the vessel was ready to be launched, the stern galleries had to be built, the rudder hung and a false keel (o) fitted. This operation must have been very difficult, for the false keel went below the keel which now rested on the blocks bearing the weight of the entire structure.

¹ P. Pering A Brief Enquiry into the Causes of Premature Decay in Wooden Bulwarks. (Plymouth 1812) pp 42, 46.

Illustration 2.4



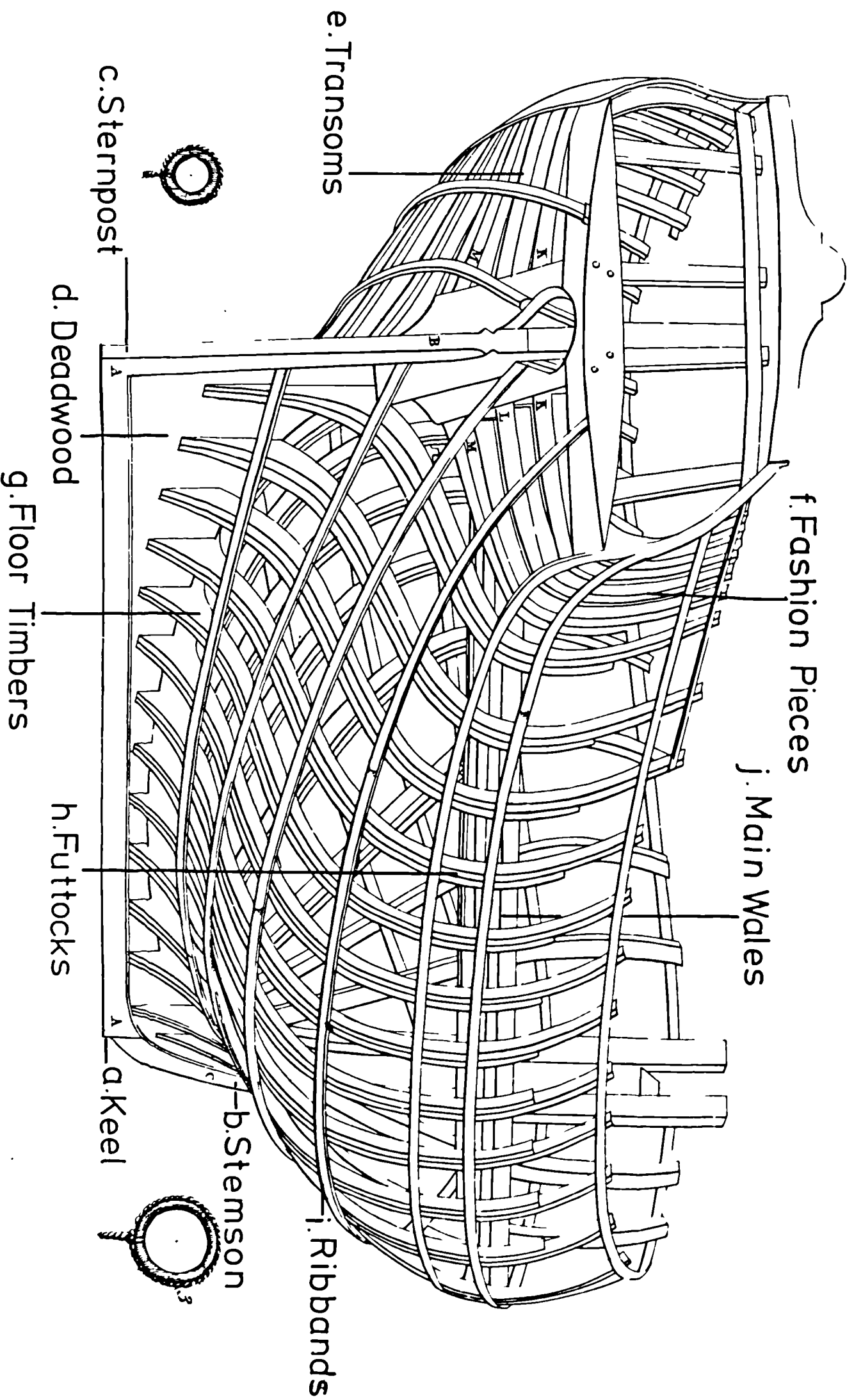


Illustration 2.5

This photograph shows details of the scaffolding and working platforms used in wooden shipbuilding. It also illustrates two stages of construction. On the nearest slip is a vessel in the initial stage of building. The blocks on which the assembled keel is laid are quite visible. The stemson has been raised and the first floor timbers placed. The ship on the second slip is advanced to the point of building where the interior works are to be fitted next.

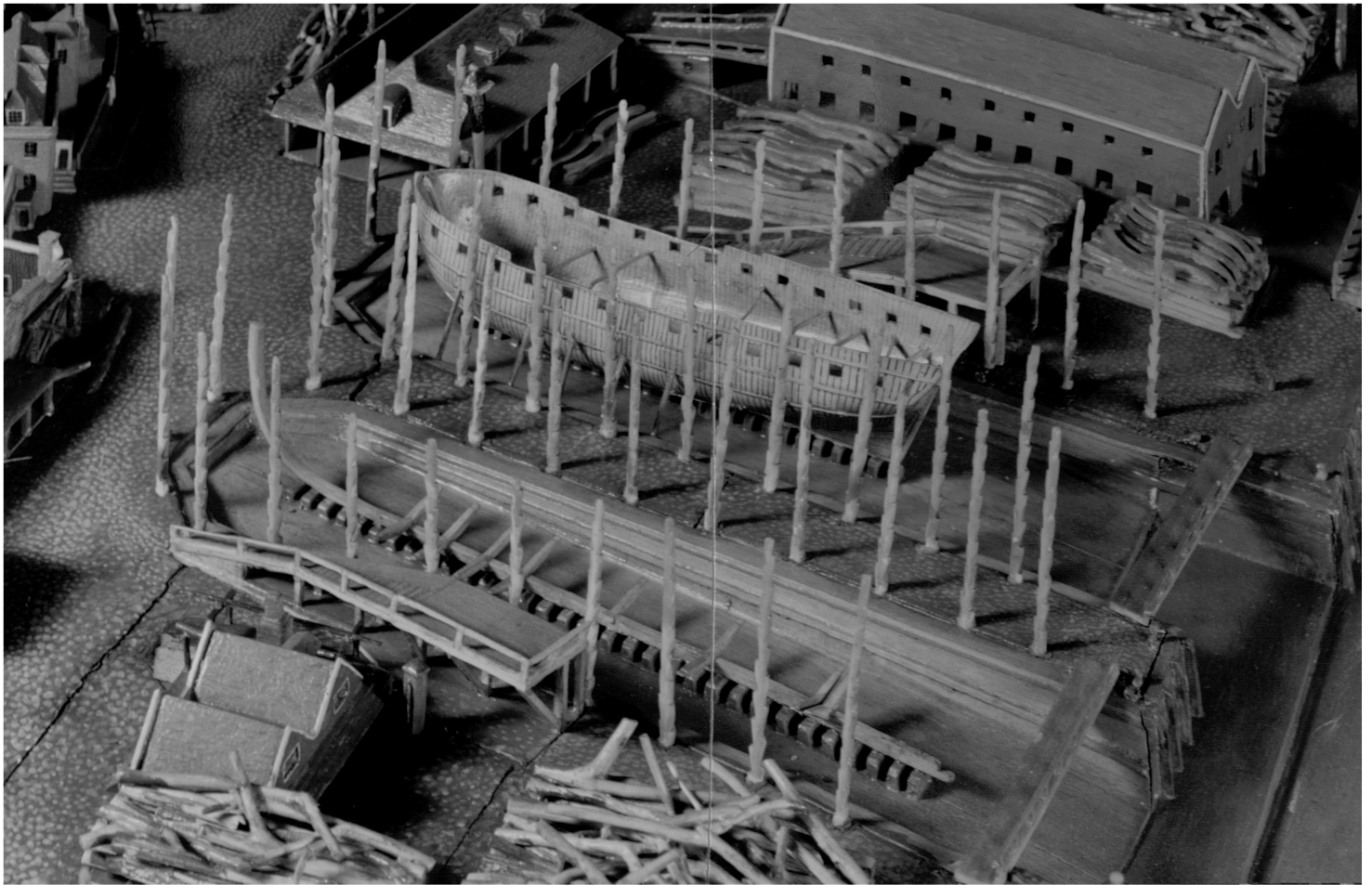


Diagram 2.5 Midship Frame

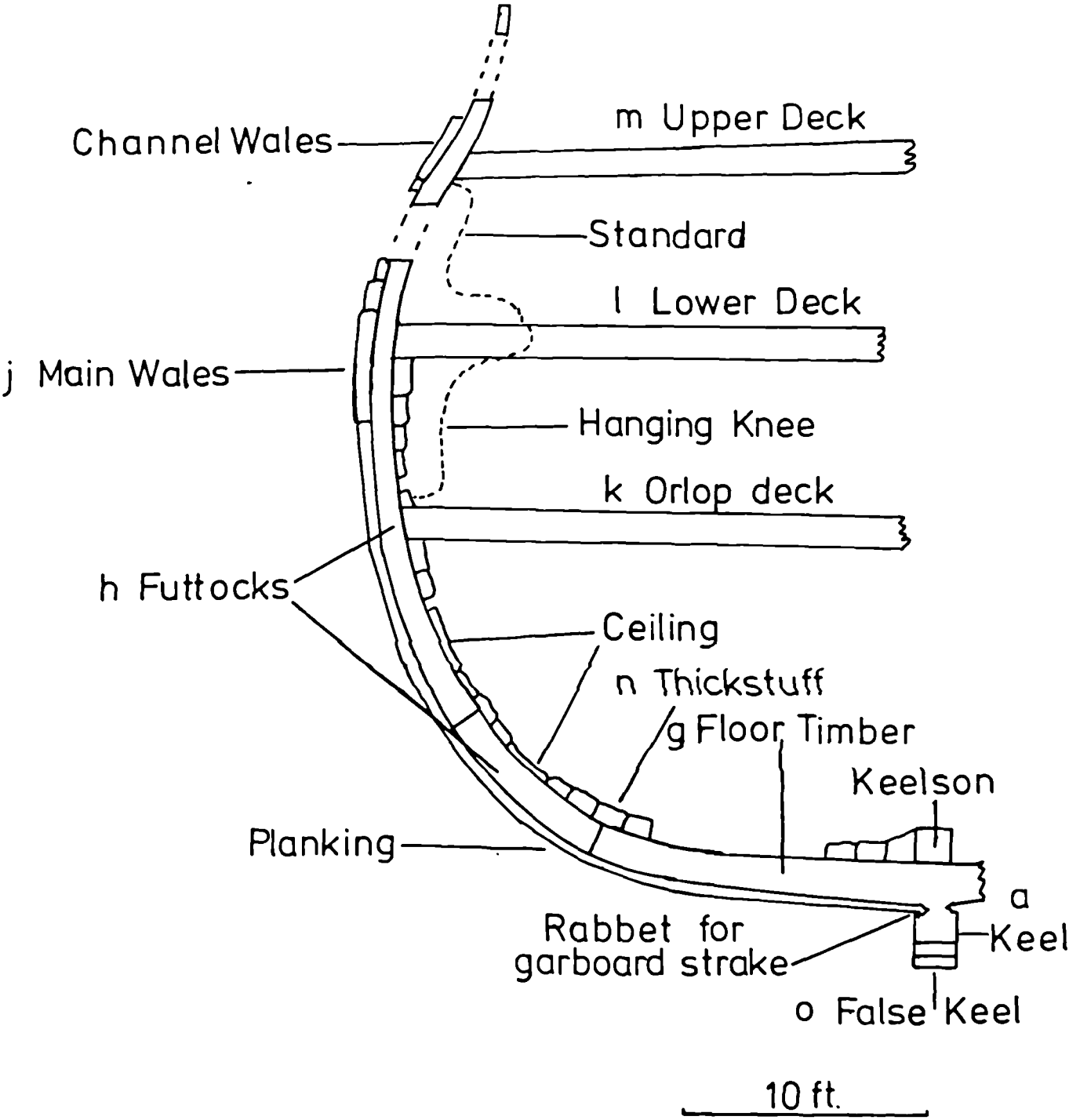


Illustration 2.6

Leading from the two nearest slips are permanent ways on which the completed vessels were launched. The vessel on the lefthand slip is advanced to the point where all the floor timbers have been laid, the stern timbers and transoms raised and the first ribs built up from the futtocks. Further futtocks lay along-side. The slip next to this is nearly complete, wanting only its stern galleries, round house and poop decks. In the distance is a finished vessel temporarily decked over so that it can season without being exposed to the weather.



Illustration 2.7 Treenail Mooters



Illustration 2.8 A shipwright boring holes to take treenails and bolts.



Its fitting was made possible by the fact that, to begin with, oak caps had been placed on the blocks; these could now be split and removed. If done properly, parts of the ship would be left suspended. The false keel could be slipped in and bolted beneath, a piece at a time. Before coppering, the vessel had to be caulked and the bottom payed. Coppering could, in fact, be done after launching, thus avoiding damage to the sheathing.

For most of this period these tasks had to be done in the open air. Except when the men had the shelter of a deck they were exposed to all weathers and one suspects that many workmen suffered from lifelong rheumatic and other pains, as must have many other eighteenth century workers.

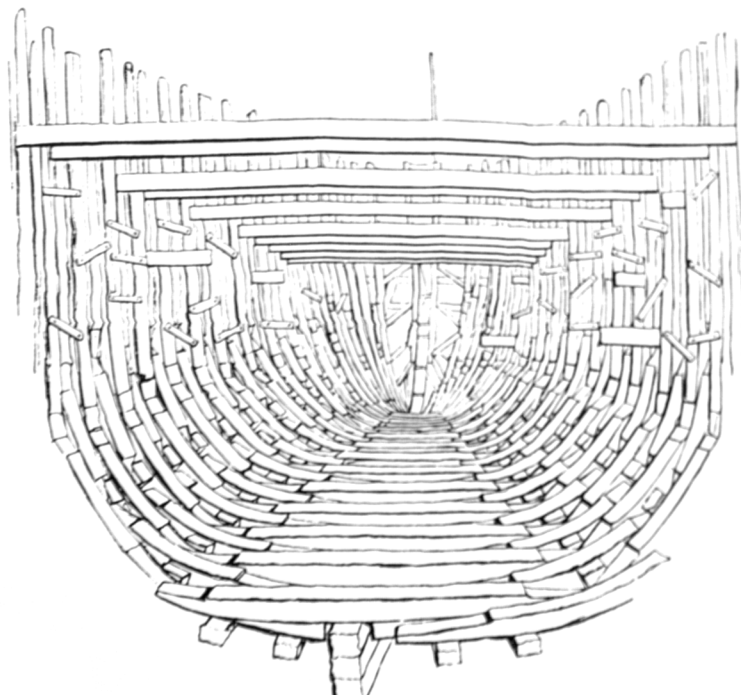
The most characteristic tools of the shipwrights were the adze, axe, auger and maul (hammer)¹ (see Illustration 2.11). With the first two they trimmed and shaped the timbers and planking. The rough cutting was done by sawyers, some planking being bent by steaming. Timber shaping was attended to by the scavelmen. Some timbers took many hours to soften, so that the kilns had to be looked after during the night. The auger and the maul were respectively for drilling holes and driving treenails and bolts into them. For the great wooden bulwarks of England were virtually pegged together. Treenails were dowels of well seasoned oak, a foot to forty two inches long and about an inch and a half in diameter. Their manufacture was a separate occupation, they were made by a sharp tool called a moot, from wood that had been split along its grain (see Illustration 2.7). Time enough was allowed, after the hole had

¹ R.A. Salaman Tools of the Shipwright 1650 - 1925 Folk Life 5 (1967) pp. 19-50.

Illustration 2.9 A caulker packing oakum between the planks of a ship's sides.



Diagram 2.6 The interior of a ship being built, showing the ribs and floortimbers.



been drilled, for the wood around it to season, before the treenail was driven in; then they were trimmed and wedges hammered home to make them tight. Besides being longer than the hole into which they went, the treenails were supposed to be wider. It was claimed that the shipwrights sometimes made the treenails thinner in the middle so as to make them easier to drive.¹ In Portsmouth, treenails were being made by a contractor working in the Yard. In 1814, however, the Yard paid £350 for a machine to be operated by labourers who could produce three hundred treenails an hour.²

Even harder to drive than the treenails, were metal bolts, usually of copper. At a point such as the deadwood of the stern, they could be over six feet long. Boring the holes was also a very laborious task. Even on the ship's sides the holes had to go through two thicknesses of planking and the main timbers of the frame (Illustration 2.8). When working near the keel the men had to bore directly above their heads.³

Closely allied to the trade of the shipwright was that of the caulker. In fact, some shipwrights could double as caulkers being "Two" or "doubled handed", though this was more usual in the merchant Yards. First, the treenails were caulked, and then the seams between the planks were reamed, that is they were opened up with an iron wedge. This process was begun at the top of the sides and continued downwards. The practice was criticised, as it sometimes weakened the planking.⁴ Oakum was then driven in and packed tight: then the whole was sealed with pitch (see Illustration 2.9). The oakum was either hemp or old rope that

¹ R. Pering op.cit.

² N.M.M. POR/C/27 13.11.1813

³ J. Wylder Industries of the World II (1881-2) p.226

⁴ Pering op.cit.

had been unpicked by the oakum boys, who rolled it into roves for use. Further assistance was given by the pitchheaters. The bottom of the ship was payed, that is, it was covered with a tar mixture, on which paper was stuck in preparation for coppering. Much of the safety of a vessel depended on the thoroughness with which the caulkers did their work.

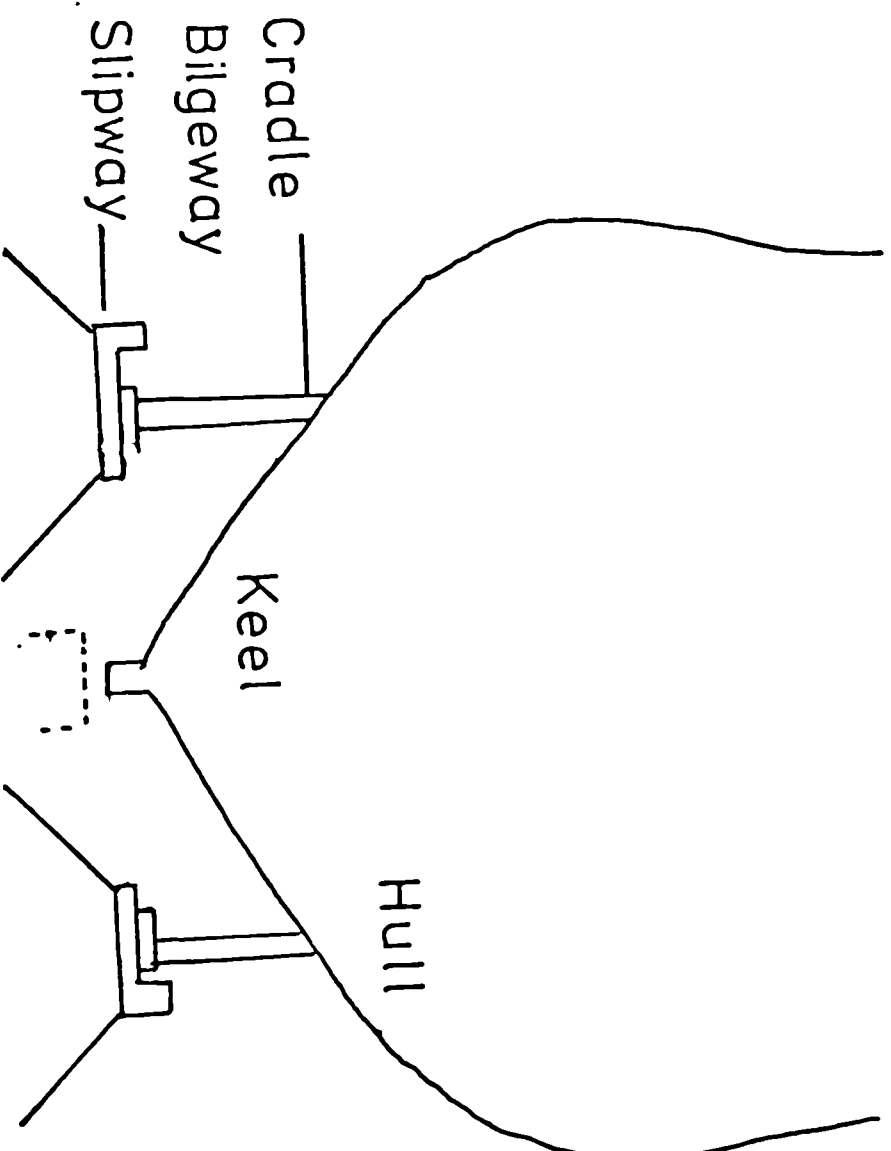
A great deal of the shipwright's work was both skilled and laborious. For really heavy lifting they had the services of labourers, scavemen and horses, but the main motive power of the Yard was muscle. Though cranes and capstans were widely used, in confined spaces much difficult lifting and carrying had to be done by men. Thus, it is not surprising that ruptures should have been frequent. Probably most at risk in this respect were the labourers, but the ropemakers were also liable to injury. The Commission of Revision recommended that trusses should be issued to ruptured Yard workers, as was already done for seamen. In fact this was done in 1815. The risk of injury was present at all times in the Dock Yard, as a contemporary put it:

"Danger is the shipwright's constant attendant from the moment he rises, till he retires to rest ... their labour is unparalleled, as are the dangers and accidents they experience, various unforeseen and beyond their power to guard against."¹

Wooden ships also contained a great deal of metal so that smiths, braziers, locksmiths, tinmen, and plumbers were also required. Other craftsmen having a hand in fitting a new vessel included joiners and the house carpenters who did much of the domestic woodwork and, after 1796, also fitted the storerooms. Woodcarvers were also needed, as were painters who, until 1802, were supplied on contract. Labourers assisted

¹ Naval Chronicle IV (1800) p.399.

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Blocks

Diagram 2.7 The Probable Launching Arrangements

the painters by preparing the paints and grinding and mixing colours. Also supplied on contract, were the many blocks that were needed. This last arrangement changed in 1803 when Portsmouth Yard began to supply all the Navy's requirements. Finally, bricklayers and masons were needed to plaster and white-wash, to fit the stoves on to brick bases and to pave the galley so as to protect it against fire. A glazier was wanted to fit all the ship's glass. The amount of labour auxiliary to the shipwrights varied with the task being undertaken, the greatest number being required for the launch.

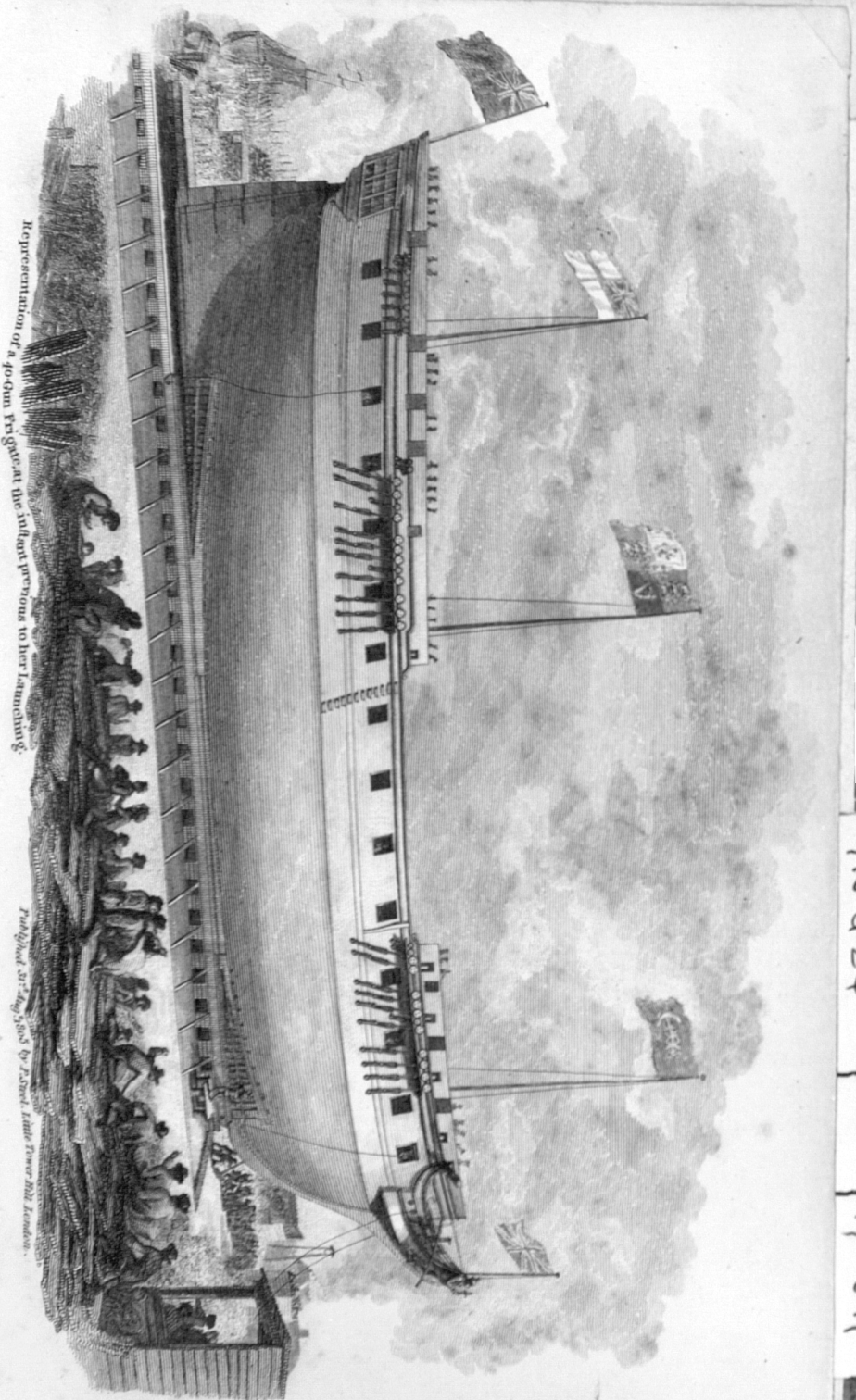
The launching of a vessel was one of the largest tasks undertaken by the Dock Yard, and was probably the most difficult operation involved in wooden shipbuilding.

Carefully shored and resting upon blocks, the vessel had to be freed of encumbrances yet held firm and able to slide into the water without damage. The whole operation required thoughtful preparations. First, a slip way was created by laying a line of blocks under the ship either side of the keel and placing planks on these leading down to the water. Along the well greased length of the slipways were laid more timbers, called bilge ways, The space between the bilge ways and the bottom of the vessel was then filled with timbers and posts (see Diagram 2.7). Known as the cradle, this woodwork could now support the ship, and the vessel was raised by easing wedges, driven by carefully coordinated blows, between the bilge ways and the hull. Relieved of much weight the blocks under the keel could be partially or totally removed. The shoring was then taken away and the weight of the vessel rested on the lubricated slip ways. To prevent premature movement down the ways, "dog shores" were fitted to the bilge ways. On the order to launch, the "dog shores" were knocked away and, if necessary, the vessel

Illustration 2.10
 A frigate at the
 moment of launching.
 Note the cradle and
 slid-way, also the men
 under the bows knocking
 away the do' shores.

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Representation of a 40-gun frigate at the instant previous to her launching.

Published at King's Head, by T. and A. Smith, Little Tower Hill, London.

was started by the application of a large screw to the bow.¹ The exertion and care needed to launch a ship excited poets and artists (see Illustration 2.10). The launching of a large vessel was a public occasion, something of the atmosphere of which was captured by a writer to the Monthly Magazine:

"One of the most grand and interesting spectacles that can be exhibited, or perhaps imagined, is the launch of one of these stupendous ships; to be present on such an occasion - to witness with tens of thousands of spectators arranged around, place above place, as in a vast amphitheatre - the gigantic power of man displayed in this wonderful achievement - to mark the anxiety and enthusiasm of the whole assembly - to perceive in them for some moments before the appointed stroke is aimed that gives the stately vessel to her fate, almost to delirium - to hear the tremendous crash of spars and shores, amid the loud pealing shouts that now burst forth, cheering the decorated ship to her destined element."²

In merchant yards, where ships such as that in the illustration were built for the navy on contract, Dock Yard shipwrights were sent to launch and fit out those vessels. In 1807 the Navy Board tried to stop this practice but the Dock Yard Officers reported:

We beg to acquaint you that it is absolutely necessary some shipwrights should be sent hither (i.e. to the merchant yards) to cut the mast holes and wedge the Masts Bowsprits etc. Otherwise we are of the Opinion that the ship will be delayed from the want of proper persons to perform that work."³

Once launched from a merchant yard a vessel was jury-rigged and navigated to Portsmouth by the Dock Yard riggers. There, in common with ships built in the Yard, she would undergo the difficult operation of masting. This was done by means of a hulk rigged with sheers. The masts were floated out to the two vessels, then lifted by means of the sheers and placed in position, that is, stepped (see Illustration 2.11). This was done to all the lower masts until they were secured with their rigging,

¹ G. Dodd Days at the Factory (1843)

² Monthly Magazine 12 (1801) p.217.

³ N.M.M. POR/D/28 8.4.1807.

Then the top masts were lowered into position through the top platforms so that they overlapped the lower masts without touching them. In turn the top gallants and royals were raised and rigged.¹ As the lower main mast of a seventy four gun ship was over one hundred feet long and the other sections had a combined length nearly as great, the hazards of the exercise are quite clear. The masting of ships was part of the responsibility of the Master Attendants. It was some of their staff, the riggers, who erected the vessels' standing rigging, though they were supplemented by contract riggers. The captain and crew of a ship saw to the running rigging.

Workshops

Shipwrights were involved in the process of creating a ship before an adze was ever laid to wood. Though vessels were designed in the Surveyor's office in London, draftsmen were needed in the Dock Yard Officers' cabins and in the mould lofts; it was shipwrights who filled these positions. The mould loft was,

"... a room, the length of which rather more than equals half the length of the largest ship to be planned there; and on the boarded floor of this loft innumerable lines are chalked, to mark the several parts of the vessel. The architect in the first place, draws out his plan upon paper, on a scale of a quarter of an inch to the foot; from this plan he marks the lines on the mould loft floor the full size of the intended ship. This chalked plan comprises a horizontal plan of half the ship in the direction of its length, and a transverse section of the ship at its greatest breadth. From these as a standard the architect proceeds to chalk numerous other lines representing the timber ribs or frames... These shaped pieces, which constitute collectively the "mould" of the ship are solely to guide the shipwrights in cutting their various timbers to form the hull of the vessel. The concave and convex edges of the mould pieces, and certain chalk marks upon their surfaces, give the length, breadth and peculiar forms of all the ships timbers required."²

¹ J. Wylder op.cit. p.228.

² J. Coad The Chatham Mast Houses and Mould-loft MM 59 (1973) pp 127-134.
J. Wylder op.cit. p.222.

The moulds were of thin flexible pieces of timber and were "... the connecting link between the naval architect and the shipwright." The preparation for a First rate occupied six shipwright apprentices and two joiners for seven weeks.¹ From the loft the moulds were carried to the stacks of timber and suitable pieces of wood were chosen to match their shape which was then cut upon a saw pit. This process of conversion was overseen by shipwrights and was very important in the economy of the dockyard.

It was best for the yard to receive timber in a rough state, for in this way wood was obtained in more usable lengths and shape. In 1806 the Navy Board complained of its timber supplies that,

"... in some instances pieces that would make long Fourth Futtocks and Top Timbers are cut in two to make inferior futtocks this bad conversion being most advantageous to the Merchant in point of price."²

To avoid accidents of this nature the convertors needed skill and experience.

"The conversion of timber is a most important part of any ship-building establishment, because upon the judgement and integrity with which this duty is performed depend to a considerable extent the strength of a ship, and the economy of appropriating large quantities of very costly stores."³

In fact, the whole of the management of the Yard's timber supply was in the hands of the shipwrights. From 1801 this was under the general supervision of the Timber Master. In order to try and overcome the timber shortage the Navy tried to salvage it by dismantling old ships. This was done at piece-rates and the shipwrights again required the assistance of labourers and horses. In 1814, however, the Resident Commissioner recommended that, because there was no room to store the

¹ PP. 1806 (312) V, 415 op.cit. p.292.

² NMM POR/A/49 15.5.1806.

³ J. Fincham An Outline of Naval Architecture III (1851) p.42.

timber, no more should be broken up.¹ It would seem that this advice was not followed; for a year later the Navy Board ordered that neither task nor job companies were to be used for this sort of inferior work.² Generally, the Navy Board was anxious to try and utilise its skilled labour in the most efficient manner. The jobs that added the least to productivity were supposed to go to the poorest craftsmen. Low-skilled jobs such as scrapping and painting for survey were supposed to be done at day-rates only and the Master Boatmaker was forbidden to use shipwrights for drawing boats out of the water.³ However, this policy was never clearly formulated and, in practice, many obstacles were raised to it. One of the most wasteful uses of labour was doing repairs afloat. It would appear that men working at Spithead were paid day rates with allowances for time spent going to the ship and sleeping aboard. That this was an unpopular duty is suggested by an order of the Navy Board which said that caulkers lent to Portsmouth from Deptford were not to be favoured in any way. They were to take their turn at Spithead.⁴ The Commission of Revision advised that, when possible, only the least able men should be employed afloat.

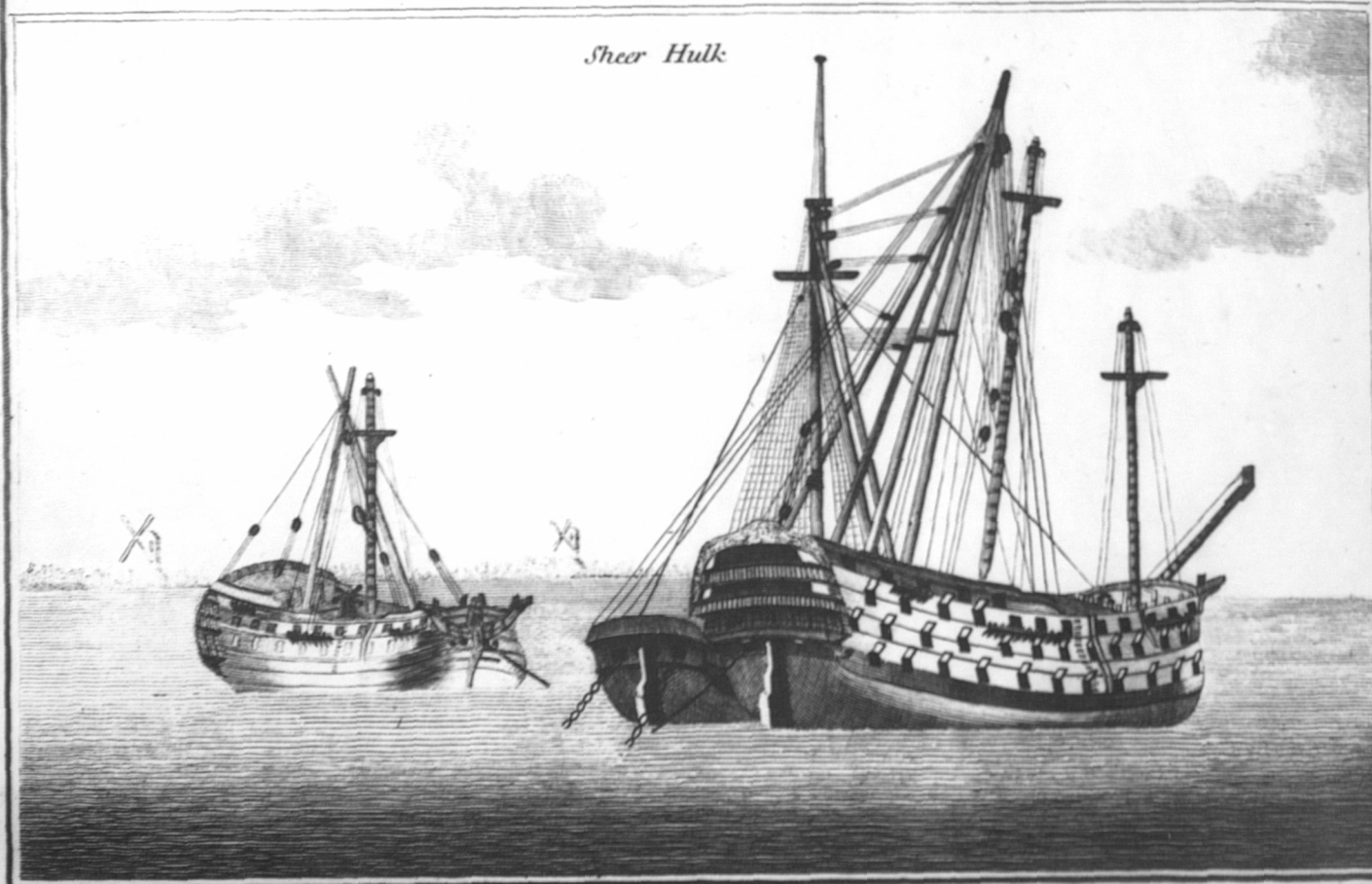
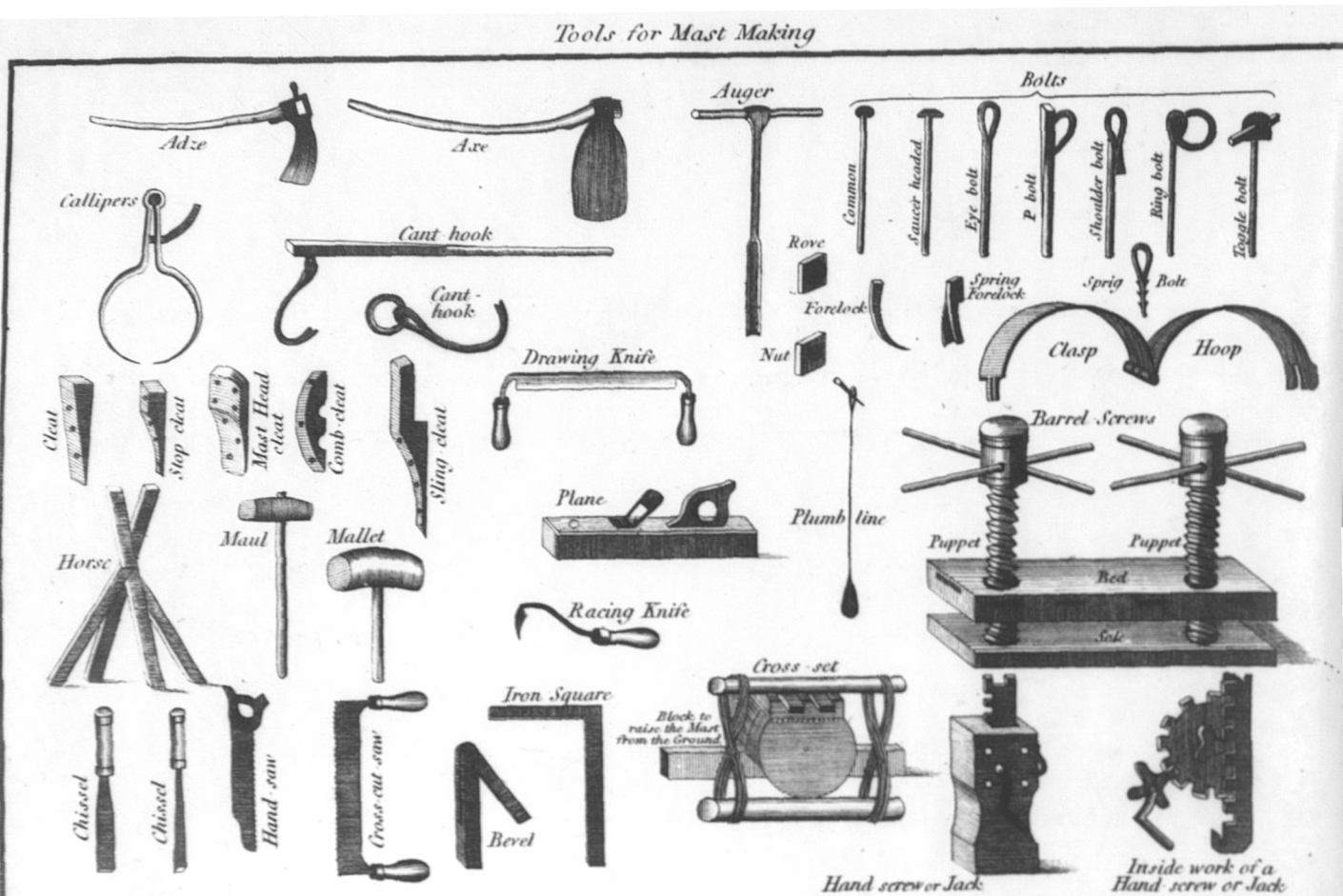
Crossing the water and living on board ship exposed the workmen to wind and rain and also the risk of falling into the sea. In 1814 the Yard surgeon reported,

"Amongst the numerous accidents which occur in this Yard Sudden Deaths by Drowning are not infrequent casualties for which we are not fully prepared as the extent of the establishment would require when it is recollected that besides the Yard and Ordinary (amounting alone to Five Thousand men) there are always a great number of seamen employed on Yard Duty and Troops generally embarking and disembarking."

In order to rectify this, he had provided, at his own expense, resuscitating apparatus, but he still required "Galvanic Influence and Oxygen Gas."⁵

1 NMM POR/F/33 3.5.1814
 2 " " /G/4 30.12.1814
 3 " " /A/37 23.10.1794
 4 " " /A/40 10.10.1797
 5 " " /C/30 29.3.1814

Illustration 2.11 Mastmaking



The large Figure is a Ship, whose Masts are to be got on-board, lying along side the Sheer Hulk, as practised in the Navy. The small Ship shews the mode of fixing the Sheers in a Merchant Ship, and getting her Masts on board.

The work of the men in the various houses ashore was highly skilled and, like the task gangs, the workmen for these were selected before the shipwrights were shoalled.

Mast and Boatmaking

Mastmaking was skilled work requiring very true shaping and joining as most of the masts were composite, being made up of several 'sticks'. Much mast timber was received in the Yard roughly converted, and stored until needed in tiers, underwater in mast ponds. A lot of the rest of the shaping was done by the sawyers, the mastmakers completing it with adze, axe, drawing knife and plane (see Illustration 2.11).

The mastmakers, after carefully selecting a faultless piece of timber, laid it upon piles of planks. Then a flat surface was cut and a line drawn down its middle. The timber was then canted, that is turned, and using the line on the first side as a guide, a new surface was smoothed; and so on. There were thus an increasing number of flat surfaces, the mast was not actually round until it was nearly complete.¹ The mast was held together by coaks, large dowels, and iron hoops which had replaced rope woldings.

"The hoops are made of iron, four and a half inches broad, half an inch or five-eighths thick, and the edge that first goes on the mast is chamfered on the inside."²

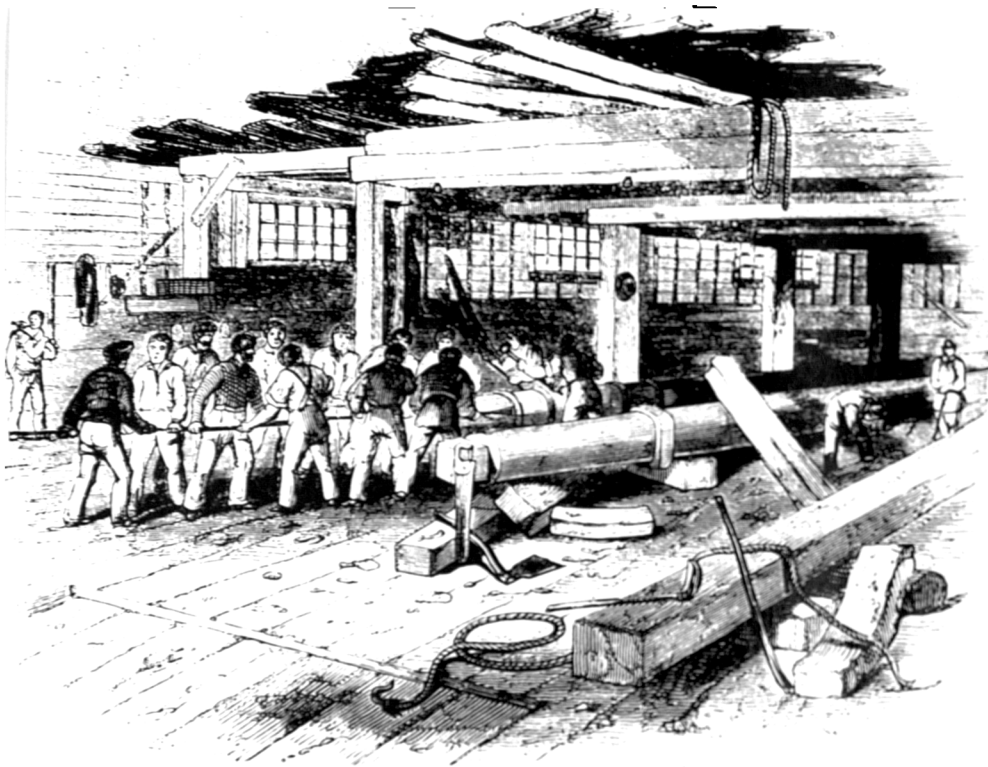
Measurements for the hoops were taken from the mast; for those that were not round, moulds were made. The hoops were heated nearly red, then driven on the mast to their stations by long round bars of iron called pokers, bent and flattened at one end. The mast was " .. greased with

¹ P. Kippling Rudimentary Treatise on Mastng, Mastmaking and Rigging of Ships (1873).

² Steel Elements of Mastmaking Sailmaking and Rigging (1794)p.26.

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Illustration 2.12 Hoopin a mast.



tallow to facilitate the driving ... and prevent masts from burning. The hoop when driven to its station is cooled with water, which shrinks it and increases the tension." Additional details of the exercise are given in a later account:

"Six men grasp the long handle of an iron bar, with which they strike the edge of the hoop on one side of the mast while six others do the same on the other side of the mast with another bar; and two men give powerful blows with hammers on the surface of the hoops. Signals are given to ensure regularity of movement and the whole scene presents a singularly busy picture".¹ (See Illustration 2.12)

Yards and spars were made in a similar manner though the smaller of these could be obtained from a single stick. An allied occupation was that of making the tops, the strong platforms set where the lower mast joined the top mast and in fact holding the two together.

Portsmouth had three mast houses each with a particular purpose. The first made most of the masts, booms, yards and gear for boats; the second, bowsprits and short masts. The third house was near the water and was used as a receiving and despatching point. Large masts and yards were towed to where they were required, which meant that men and horses had to be employed either launching them or dragging them out of the water and to and from the workshops. To some extent, therefore, the state of the tide determined some of the work in this line.²

Not all the mastmakers' employment was in the workshops or in the Yard. Certain repairs had to be carried out afloat as removing masts and major yards was a cumbersome procedure. Only a few masts were kept fully made up, which meant that after a battle there was feverish activity in order to try and replace damaged masts. It was a recognised French tactic

¹ J. Wylder op.cit. p.227.

² S.M. Simon Goodrich Collection memo 27.6.1807.

to fire high so as to damage the sailing qualities of their adversaries and thus enable themselves to disengage and escape. Like the Dutch, the British fired at the enemy's hull. Boats were another item that suffered heavily in battle.

The Yard's boathouse not only provided small craft for the Navy but a variety of small boats for use in the Yard. Skill and great experience was required in the construction of boats because there were so many different types. Shipwrights also built the capstans, an important part of the machinery of both Dock Yards and ships. As they consisted of several moving parts and were highly decorative, the task of making a capstan was probably similar to that of the wood-working millwright and very skilled. Besides repairing and building capstans the shipwrights also had to service those in the Yard.

Another of the few machines to be found on a ship or in the Yard during the eighteenth century was the pump. Until 1811 these were made by the shipwrights, who also supervised their use in the Dock Yard.

An attempt was made to use old and infirm shipwrights to make oars, a job which had previously been done by house carpenters. However, the old men were unable to provide the eleven thousand, or more, oars that were needed every year and specialist oarmakers were used instead. Well-chosen pieces of wood were shaped with knives, planes and spoke shaves, being held steady in vices and on wooden horses.¹

Besides working in gangs and in workshops, the shipwrights also saw occasional service outside the Yard. Not only did men go to the merchant Yards to help to launch and fit out vessels, ~~but~~ young, though experienced,

¹ D. Steel The Art of Making Mast Yards Etc (1816) p.180.

workingmen were sent to oversee the building of contract ships. Others were sometimes sent to expedite work in the merchant yards. In addition, shipwrights served at sea as ships' carpenters, and abroad in the Navy's various establishments, from Bombay to the Great Lakes.¹

From all that has been said it can be seen that the building and maintenance of a wooden navy was a vast industrial undertaking. It was one, more-over, that required the co-ordination of many activities. Even the principal occupational group involved, the shipwrights, was comprised of men with many subordinate and interlocking skills. It seems likely that the attitudes of mutual self reliance that the technical requirements of the shipwrights craft demanded, co-operation in gangs and between gangs and a common exposure to danger, influenced their social attitudes away from work. The work situation contributed to the group solidarity which the Yard workers displayed in so many activities. The economic aspect of this is revealed by an examination of the piece-rate system under which the shipwrights worked.

¹ POR/D/28, 8.4.1807
 POR/A/58, 31.1.1814

The Shipwright's wages system

The problem with shipwrights' work was that, unlike many other occupations, individual output could not be measured. "There are parts of the business of a shipwright in which several must join in the execution.."¹ noted one Parliamentary enquiry. Also, the building or repairing of a ship could be very complex and it was difficult to divide the labour into measurable units. Nevertheless, the Admiralty introduced piece work into the Dock Yards, called, in shipbuilding, Task and Job.

"Task is in the building of ships in the Dock Yards, the term used for what in works carried on by private Persons is called Piece work, and in the repairing of ships another term namely Job is used for the same meaning."²

The reports of the Parliamentary enquiries that looked into the subject reveal complete confusion about the origins and the functioning of the system. Basically, ship construction was divided into twenty-five "articles", units of associated work, each article being priced in proportion to the sum set for the whole vessel. Prices varied with the tonnage of the ships and were divided among the gang as a whole. The Admiralty claimed that this system had been adopted from the merchant yards, but it is possible that it had operated there as some form of sub-contracting, each gang of shipwrights bargaining to take on a certain amount of work in building a vessel. Certainly there still existed fixed lists of prices for task and job done in the merchant yards of the Thames.³ One suspects, however, that the Navy's system was more rigid than that used by the civilians. Several important consequences followed from this. The first, result of payment on a gang basis, deplored by the Commission of Revision,

¹ PP 1806 (312) V 415 op.cit. p.199.

² Ibid.

³ J.M. Hans op.cit.

was a lack of competition between individual workmen in the Dock Yards. If it had existed, the Commission thought it would probably have forced wages, "... as low as they can be to afford comfortable subsistence to the labourers.", as happened in civilian life.¹ Another disadvantage was that originally the scheme of articles had been designed so as to equip a ship to the same level of preparedness as the reserve fleets. Since 1775, however, this condition had been changed, so that several items of work were outside the piece rate list. Also, there were large differences in the prices of certain articles unrelated to the labour involved. This was particularly so between the same articles of work on vessels of different sizes. As a result, shipwrights working task could earn a day wage varying between four shillings and seven, though most of the Yard Officers expressed strong reservations about trying to estimate a single days' pay.²

In some instances the scheme of articles, as laid down by the Navy Board, had virtually been abandoned. Shortages of material and expediency had led to articles being mixed together in an indiscriminate manner, which varied from Yard to Yard. In all, task work was to the disadvantage of the shipwrights who could earn more doing job work, that is repairs. This was serious, as the best workmen were always selected for the task gangs. In Portsmouth, however, shipbuilding accounted for only a small part of the Yard's activities, there being only four task gangs, employing eighty shipwrights out of a total of nearly one thousand. Much more important in Portsmouth was the way job work was organised.

¹ P.P. Comm. Revision op.cit.

² Ibid.

One writer has stated that in the 1790s task work, "became liable to more abuse than was ever experienced under the old system."¹ By comparison with job work, task was a model of efficiency, in fact the situation with regard to job was so bad that the Commission of Enquiry thought that piece rates for repair work should be done away with completely, though a subsequent Commission disagreed. Many of the disadvantages that applied to task also applied to job. They were intensified in Portsmouth, "... where the works are so numerous and so widely extended and constantly fluctuating." The result was that gangs were constantly subdivided and moved.² The Officers also said, at another time:

"We consider it impossible to keep a correct Account of Each Man's start of work, as it often happens from various circumstances one Piece of Work falls into several Hands before it is completed."^{2a}

In one way job was an improvement on the task system because, it would appear from the Yard records, each repair was separately priced after the estimates had been approved by the Board in London. However, even here there was cause for complaint. In 1801 the Board noted that there was a great difference between the prices set at Portsmouth and those in other Yards.³ A hostile critic of naval administration even claimed that the same work would cost £3 in one instance and £50 in another.⁴ In fact, as far as the workers themselves were concerned all this was of little importance, for in January 1793 the Navy Board set a flat rate of earnings of two for one, or four and twopence a day which was equivalent to double the day rate for all shipwrights. An alteration was made to this regulation to allow men on building work to "... earn

¹ R. Knight op.cit. p.167.

² NMM POR/F/31 11.12.1810

^{2a} PRO ADM 106/1884 Dec. 1807.

³ NMM POR/A/43 15.11.1801.

⁴ Memoirs of the Administration of the Board of Admiralty under the Presidency of the Earl St. Vincent. Letters of St. Vincent.
D. Bonner Smith op.cit.

agreeable to the sum allowed for each Article."¹ The Commission of

Enquiry pointed out:

"If Job work, as it has been stated to us, was intended to be an Employment 'bona fide' by the Piece, the same Rate of Earnings should not have been fixed for Winter and Summer as the Same Quantity of work could not have been done in the former as the latter season."²

A further complication was that in emergencies, or at very busy times, the two for one limit was lifted, though this "extra" was made as temporary as possible. In fact, it would appear that from 1793 to 1802, job wages were paid at double day rates even if the work done did not warrant it. The Navy Board complained to the Resident Commissioner at Portsmouth about job wages being calculated at two for one in the common hours of the Yard "... without being governed by the aggregate amount of work done."³ In many respects, the Yard's piece rate scheme degenerated into a method of day measured work, that is the payment of a predetermined daily wage for an agreed minimum level of production. A job was priced so that in a given time a known number of workmen could earn the official daily rate. That the system generally worked to the benefit of the shipwrights, is indicated by the fact that task and job were extended to work done in the workshops, partly in response to unrest among the artificers over their earnings.

In the late seventeen-nineties and early years of the next century the authorities' increasing concern about the administration of the Dock Yards, especially their method of payment, resulted in a series of enquiries and reforms. In January of 1801 the Navy Board was complaining that since 1794 the cost of labour had risen from £670,516 per year to

¹ NMM POR/A/37 7.10.1794

² PP 1803-04 (83) III 1. op.cit. p.23.

³ NMM POR/A/46 19.1.1804.

£869,944.¹ Next month the Board revised the method of keeping the Yard's pay books. The old way had not allowed the Comptroller to determine who earned what. Of these same documents General Bentham wrote:

"On my first inspection of these books I must confess that notwithstanding all I had already witnessed in regard to the keeping of dockyard books my astonishment was very great, for never before had I seen the existence of such glaring instances of inaccuracy and inefficiency."²

Further, in October 1802 the Board extended the two for one limit on earnings to all the Yard workmen, presumably in order to keep down wages, though this general limit appears to have been lifted when war resumed. For the rest of the wars it would seem that, despite Navy Board protests, shipwrights' earnings were determined by the Yard Officers, who calculated the total price of all work done by: the task gangs, the dockside gangs doing repairs, the shipwrights in the masthouse, boat, capstan and tophouses. The sums thus achieved were divided by the number of men in each category, thereby giving a parity of earnings for each type of work.³

However, job working was now much more carefully regulated. The freedom of the Officers to send Estimates to the Board was done away with and a fixed price list was introduced.⁴ Moreover, new methods of recording the work done were developed.⁵ An important reform was the placing of quartermen on salaries. Previously, their earnings had depended on those of their companies and, as the quartermen measured the work, the temptation they were faced with is clear. The Commission of Revision felt that since the report of the previous enquiry the job system had been much improved and could be further reformed; therefore, they did not second

¹ NMM POR/A/46 2.1.1801.

² M.S. Bentham op.cit.

³ NMM POR/A/46 9.2.1804
NMM POR/F/31 11.12.1810

⁴ NMM POR/A/44 2.1.1802

⁵ NMM/POR/A/49 4.9.1806

the Commission of Enquiry's recommendation that piece rates for repair work should be done away with. The Commission suggested that a new department should be created in the Yard to be responsible for the measuring and recording of all the work done by the shipwrights. There were to be a number of sub-measurers, under a master measurer, who were to be responsible to the Master Shipwright. The costing of repairs was to be done by the master measurer according to a new and comprehensive scheme of prices, any necessary addition to the scheme to be approved by the Navy Board. No work afloat was to be done at piece rates and, whenever possible, only inferior workmen were to be employed at this. These recommendations were adopted in 1811, after a careful review of the prices for both job and task had been made by a committee of Master Shipwrights.

The discontent over the piece rate system was not on the side of the authorities alone, as the Navy Board admitted in 1809:

"The shipwrights employed by Task in building ships have for a considerable time past expressed much dissatisfaction on account of the smallness of their earnings and ... in various instances their complaints had not been without reason."¹

In fact, a new price list was now ready and the Board was going to back date it by two years, though they did not say why. Another increase in the prices was made in 1811 and the size of the work gangs was also changed from twenty men to twenty five. A year later the price scheme was revised again, some items being raised and others lowered.

As has been remarked, numerous shipwrights were employed in supervisory storekeeping or clerical functions, and it is very difficult to discover on what principle they were paid. However, until 1812 when a general table of pay was laid down, their earnings appear to have been

¹ NMM POR/A/52 7.8.1809

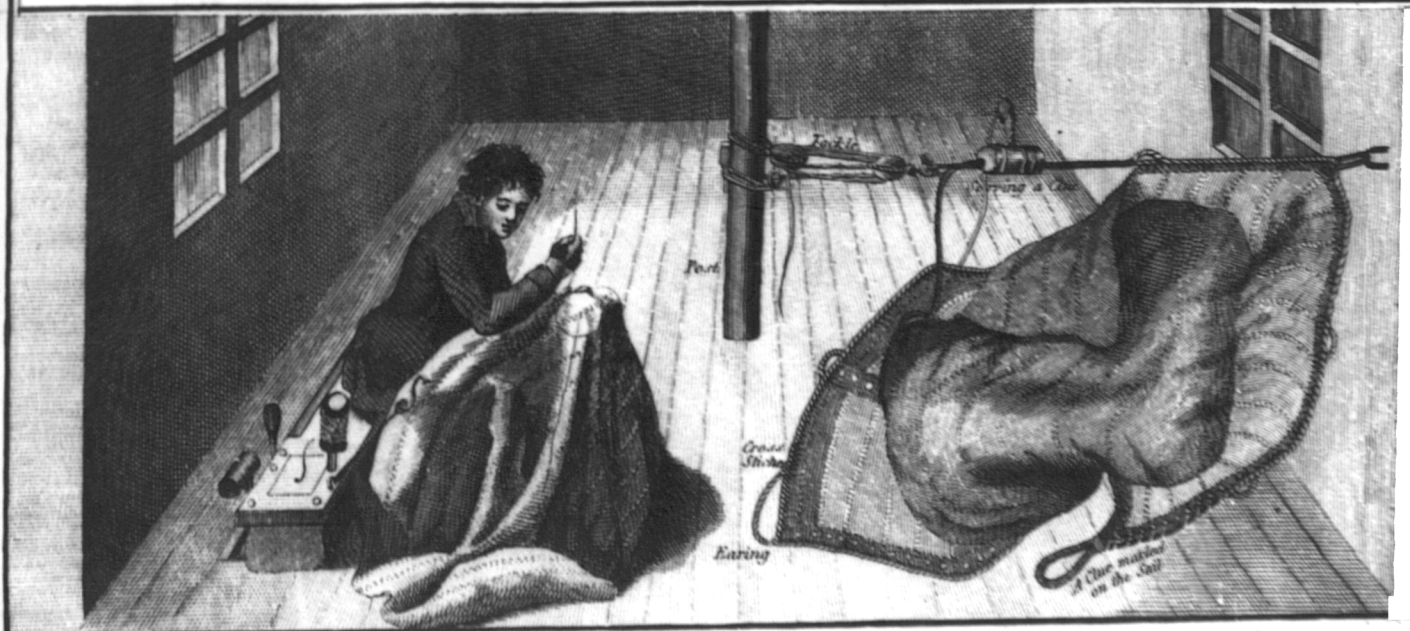
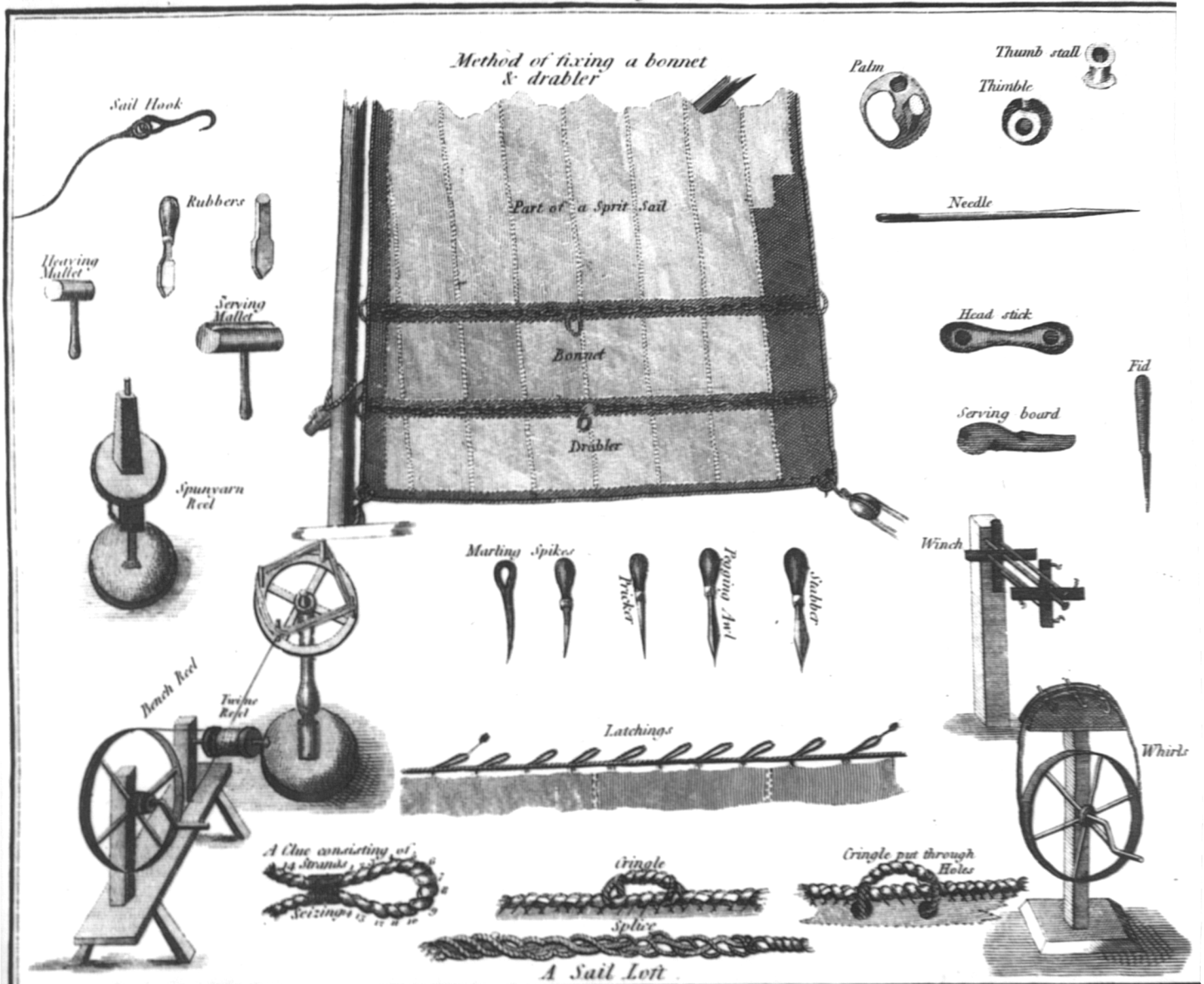
kept in line with the wages of the shipwrights working at their tools.¹

The administrative anarchy that existed in the Dock Yards in the late eighteenth century was probably to the benefit of the workmen and especially the shipwrights. As skilled workmen, the latter could exercise quite a lot of control over their productivity. This control was made all the easier because of the wide range of very complex tasks they were involved in. Perhaps the most interesting point about the shipwrights' powers of work control was that they did not use them to maximise their earnings or to create differentials. The shipwrights were willing to accept wages unrelated to the effort or skill of individuals and which tended towards a single rate. Two explanations can be suggested. The first is the favourite cry of contemporary critics of the Yards, corruption. The wages of the Yards, it was claimed, were inflated, by fraud, beyond the value of the work done. The second possibility is that the craftsmen who built and repaired the Navy's vessels had a very strong sense of occupational solidarity and based on this a distinct attitude towards work and earnings which emphasised collective rather than individual interests.

Of necessity the shipwrights have been examined in detail, but though they were the largest single group of craftsmen in the Yard there were also numerous representatives of other trades.

¹ NMM POR/A/56 8.5.1812
 " POR/A/58 14.6.1814
 " POR/A/58 12.11.1814

Illustration 2.13 Sailmaking

The Practice of Sail making with the Tools.

Other Craftsmen

In dealing with most of the skilled workmen in the Dock Yard, other than the shipwrights, it is possible, because the nature of their work was fairly simple and because detailed information about them is lacking, to be brief. Fuller consideration can only be given to a few groups, namely: the smiths, the ropemakers and the workmen associated with the various mills erected in the Yard during this period. Justification for concentrating on each of these groups will be made in turn as they are examined. For the moment, we must turn to the other craftsmen in the Yard.

The work of the caulkers has been described and their relationship with the shipwrights noted; the latter were more skilled, but the caulkers required greater strength. Like the shipwrights, the caulkers were shoaled into companies of twenty, later twenty-four, and they worked a piece rate scheme. No details of this have been found, but there is no reason to think that it was particularly complex, even though a petition from the caulkers in 1806 suggests that their hours may have been longer than those generally worked in the Yard.¹

Another distinct group of workmen in the Yard were the sailmakers whose craft lay in the cutting of canvas purchased ready from contractors, with a knife and proper stitching of narrow widths into sails of different sizes and shapes (see Illustration 2.13).² In 1813 a canvas cutting machine was introduced into the sailmaking loft.³ Care was also needed in the preparation of bolt ropes on to which the sail was sewn. The ropes were baked overnight in an oven, which had been preheated and cleaned out, then

¹ NMM POR/F/27 20.6.1806

² D. Steel op.cit. : Article on Sailmaking.

³ NMM POR/A/58 17.8.1813.

dipped in tar.¹ The twine with which the stitching was done also had to be prepared with wax or tar. Sails also required airing and the removal and stowage of them was also a task that needed skilled labour.² In general, there were few slack periods in sailmaking; for a large stock was always needed to make good storm damage or the destruction of battle. Sailmakers also worked at home, making hammocks at 8d. each. A brief trial allowing "The wives and daughters of Artificers of the Yards" to make hammocks from old canvas was given up as too expensive.³ For the regular sailmakers, long hours of close stitching posed a threat to their eyesight. In addition, as the foremen complained one January, "... the workmen sustain great inconvenience from numbness of the fingers in working wet or damp canvas at this season of the year."⁴

The remuneration of this class of workmen was simply based on output. Until 1802 the sailmakers had to stitch forty four yards of waxed or fifty of dipped twine in five hours, a rate that had been established in 1795 but which, it was found, an expert could do in four hours.⁵ The readjusted rate was fifty yards of one twine and fifty seven yards of the other. Two years later the Navy Board were enquiring about the sailmakers' task as the men had been complaining about it. The time-limit, the cause of their dissatisfaction, was reduced, in response to their complaints, to four and a half hours. The master sailmaker agreed to be responsible for seeing that his men did not skimp their work.⁶ The Navy Board also tried to maintain the standard of workmanship by

1 SM. Simon Goodrich Papers Memo 18.9.1815.
 2 NMM POR/D/28 6.12.1810.
 3 NMM POR/G/2 14.10.1802.
 4 NMM POR/A/49 16.4.1807
 5 NMM POR/G/2 4.8.1804.
 6 NMM POR/A/24 24.12.1803.

avoiding sailmaking by candlelight. As a perquisite the sailmakers were allowed to have old canvas for making trousers and frocks.¹

Craftsmen familiar in walks of life other than the shipping industry found employment in the Dock Yard and little needs to be said of them. The duties of the Yard's carpenters, joiners, masons and painters and other similar artizans were probably similar to those of their civilian counterparts, except that some of them had minor tasks in fitting out ships. The house carpenter had a somewhat larger role to play in ship construction after 1795 when they helped erect storerooms.²

Piece rates for both new work and repairs were used in these trades; but, as the Yard Officers explained: "It frequently happens and it is most generally the case that those employed by the day in every branch are the best workmen."³ This statement is at variance with what is known of the way shipwrights worked; it will be remembered that the best shipwrights were supposed to be set aside for the task gangs.

Undoubtedly each occupation had its own customs and privileges, such as that of the masons who had from "time immemorial" been allowed a supply of tools; but many of these traditions have not been recorded. They probably did not make for any significant difference among the craftsmen.⁴

There were several bodies of workers in the Yard whom it might be best to regard as semi-skilled. For instance, the riggers may be considered as such, Commissioner Grey said of them "... tho' not classed as artificers still a great proportion of the work performed by them requires both skill and practice and certainly is very laborious."⁵

¹ NMM POR/A/24 24.12.1803

² See p.

³ NMM POR/D/29 6.8.1811

⁴ NMM POR/D/28 28.8.1810

⁵ NMM POR/D/29 4.11.1811

The riggers worked both afloat and ashore in the rigging-house, one of which was described by David Steel, the eighteenth century author of several texts on marine subjects:

"At the upper end is a windlass and at distances, down the middle are rows of large strong posts, for stretching ropes, and laying on service. On each side of the house are berths for the men to prepare small rigging in."

"There is much subordinate knowledge necessary before a person can either prepare rigging in a house or fit it on board of a ship. This consists of knotting, splicing, making hitches, mousing, serving etc..."¹.

On board ships the riggers erected the standing rigging which held the masts. Riggers also prepared and maintained the harbour moorings, their knowledge of which was of great value to the Master Attendants in moving and berthing vessels. Clearly, therefore, many of the duties of the riggers were similar to those of seamen and they shared the same risks; foul weather, ruptures and serious falls. In fact, the rigging house was considered the preserve of seamen, but, during war, many landsmen found their way into the house. When the Peace of Amiens came in 1802 all the landsmen, except those familiar with the moorings, were ordered to be discharged. Even those kept on were to be reduced to labourers.² In future landsmen were only to be entered as labourers when seamen were not available. However, this class contained some of the best men in the house, being "... more conversant with the Duty of a House Rigger and more tractable than the seamen."³ Eventually the Admiralty agreed that landsmen "... regularly brought up in the Rigging House and found duly qualified", might be promoted to riggers and leadingmen even though they had not served at sea.⁴

¹ Steel *op.cit.* Article on rigging.

² NMM POR/G/1 18.9.1802

³ NMM POR/A/40 19.2.1802

⁴ NMM POR/A/50 6.8.1807

As the movement of wooden ships depended upon wind and tide, the riggers had to attend work outside the common hours of the Yard to help dock and undock vessels. In particular it was vital that they be on hand at mid-day meal times when the highest spring tides occurred.¹ In 1796 the riggers and their labourers petitioned the Navy Board because, when working afloat, they missed their meal and returned to the Yard wet and cold, but were not allowed to go home until 9 pm. The Board decided that from September until March the men should be given permission to go home an hour earlier than usual.² In the general rush to remobilize in 1803, the riggers were ordered to work twelve hours a day to prepare rigging in the house and to work by candle light if necessary.³

It was impossible to employ riggers on any sort of piece rate scheme because the Master Attendants used riggers and their labourers as a general work force for handling vessels, and they were constantly being called away from their work. This irregularity in working hours and pace is worth noting for it will throw an interesting light on the criminal activities of this class of workmen, when we come to consider them.

Another group of workers who might be regarded as semi-skilled were the sawyers. Requiring considerable strength, shipbuilding sawyers also needed more ability than their woodland and urban fellows.

"Instead of cutting rectangularly as in the common sawpits, the logs are placed at various angles, so as to be cut into the seemingly strange shapes which so many of the timbers of a ship present, and the directions of the cuts vary so remarkably and so frequently that it is found impracticable to apply machinery to the cutting of the timbers."⁴

1 NMM POR/D/29 22.2.1811
 NMM POR/F/30 16.3.1810
 2 NMM POR/A/30 11.1.1796
 3 NMM POR/A/30 12.10.1803
 4 J. Wylder op.cit. p.223.

Shipwrights oversaw the conversion of the timber and they also worked with the sawyers in the preparation of mast timbers, most of which, however, was done by the latter.¹

The intensity of the sawyers' labour varied with the wood that was being cut and was related to both its variety and quality. As they worked piece rates, the nature of the wood was of great importance to the sawyers and rates were adjusted accordingly.² Theirs was thirsty work and the sawyers were traditionally regarded as great drinkers and of surly temperament. They worked and were paid in pairs, the topman receiving the larger share.³ It was the topman who guided the saw and was responsible for sharpening and setting it, though in the Dock Yard one man looked after all the sawyers' tools. The most arduous work was that of the pitman, for the cutting was done on the down stroke and he was subject to a constant shower of sawdust.

Much labour was needed to move the great bulks of timber on to the pits and in taking away and stacking the wood. The traditional means of shifting uncut timber onto the pit was with a crow-bar-like instrument with a ring at one end through which a lever could be inserted in order to give extra power, these being known as "ring dogs".⁴ The drivers of the horse teams may have helped move timber by this means for they were paid an extra allowance to encourage them to "drive the dogs".⁵ However, the

¹ NMM POR/A/ 30.3.1798

² NMM POR/A/49 2.1.1807. The same price was to be paid for cutting pitch pine as for oak, it being as hard to cut.
NMM POR/A/58 19.7.1814. A quarter more was paid for sawing Adriatic oak than English.

³ Transaction of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce. Vol XXIV (1806) p.114 "... many difficulties and expenses which have long attended the operations of those requiring curvilinear sawing in their trade ... through the licentious and refractory conduct of the sawyers."

⁴ W. Rose The Village Carpenter (Cambridge 1937).
G. Sturt The Wheelwrights Shop (Cambridge 1934).

⁵ NMM/POR/D/27 2.11.1802.

word dog appears to have various meanings and in this context it might refer to some form of cart or waggon. Tools similar to ring dogs were used for moving masts, and were called "cant hooks".¹ (See Illustration 2.11)

The Smiths

In describing industrial working conditions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers have generally been concerned with those of the factories and the effects of mechanization. But a study of the work of the anchor smiths shows how the conditions of a handicraft could be as bad, if not worse, than those of a mechanised 'manufactory'. Some idea of the work of the smiths is given in a description by a Dock Yard Officer, a Mr. Pering, in a treatise on anchor making, which was both one of the most important and one of the most laborious tasks of Naval smiths.² (See Illustration 2.14)

The largest anchors weighed nearly five tons and the whole thing was made by hand. The iron parts, the shank, arms, flukes and ring were forged separately and then welded together. The stock was of two long beams of oak strongly bolted and treenailed together and secured by four iron hoops. This process will be detailed for it provides an outstanding example of an industrial technique before mechanization and shows the intense demands that were made on the workmen involved.

The shank,

"... was formed round by a number of small bars hooped together in a bundle large enough to allow for waste; slices or wedges of iron about two feet long being driven in at the large end of the shank and arms previously to their being welded, sufficiently numerous to make up for the waste of iron in welding on the arms, these though

¹ D. Steel op.cit. Article on Mastmaking

² R. Pering A Treatise on the Anchor (Plymouth 1819). Pering was clerk of the Cheque at Plymouth.

struck with a heavy hammer swung by the smith, when taken out of the fire, were only cemented about an inch and a half in depth. The shank consequently remained hollow in the middle and the centre bars left perfectly at rest."¹

The weld was weak because "... in our Dockyards the sledge hammer (was) swung only by the strength of a man". The anchor had to be turned in the fire and moved to the anvil. To judge from contemporary illustrations the equipment for this was massive. The task became more difficult once an arm had been fixed. To turn the anchor it then became necessary to dig a pit several feet deep between the anvil and the fire over which the anchor was suspended, the arm lying in it. Apparently a pit was excavated and filled in for each different anchor.

"To accomplish this excavation close to the intense fire of the anchor furnace was no trifling task; and it was difficult and hard labour that four men could excavate a pit five feet deep and as many wide in an hour. So toilsome indeed was the undertaking to those who performed it that they always received a reward of strong beer from their fellow workmen for their exertions."²

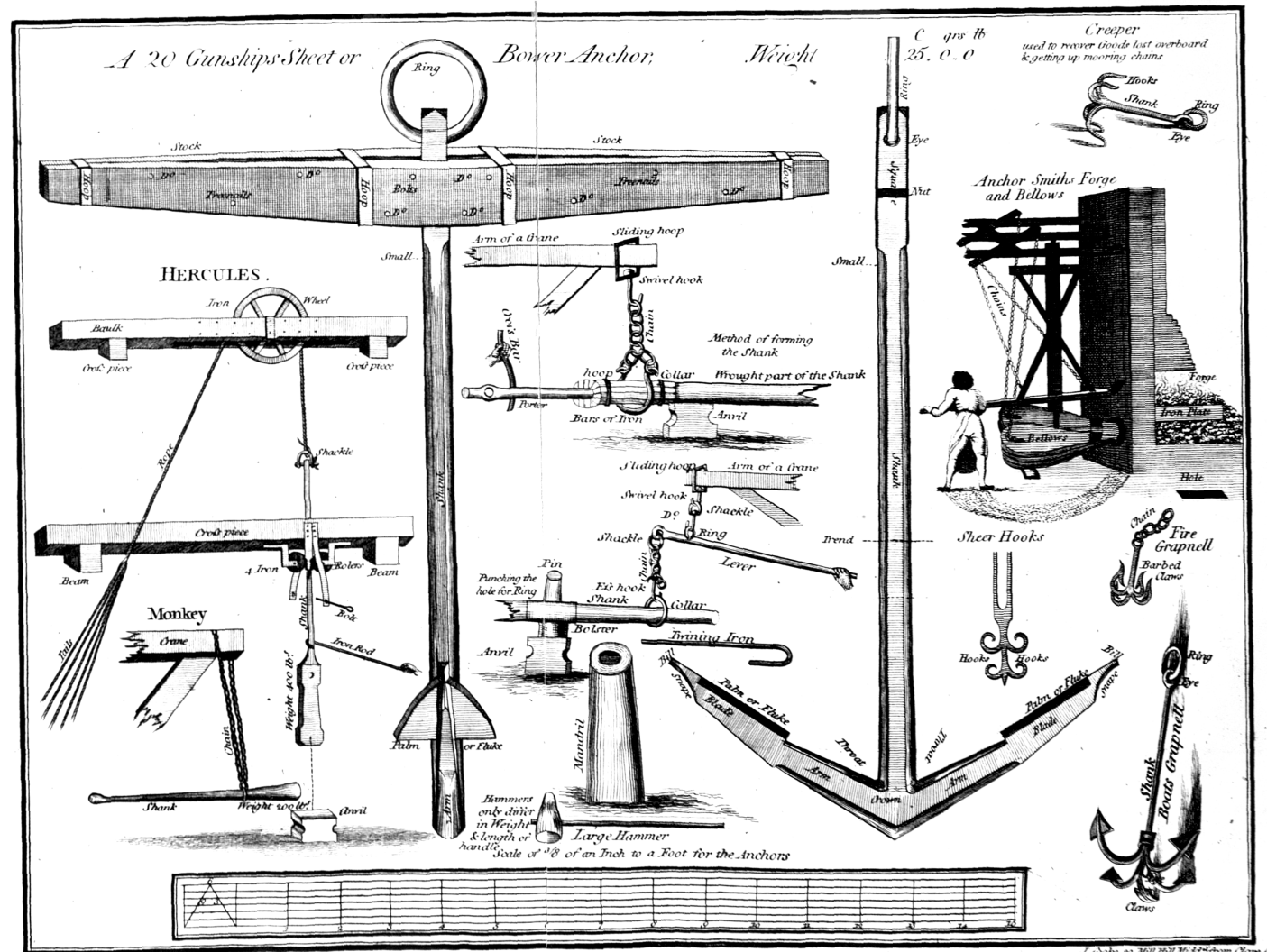
At Plymouth, Perring had built permanent pits in the form of an inverted brick arch which, when not in use, was covered with planks. He had also adopted a primitive drop hammer known as a Hercules. It was simply a four hundred pound weight faced with steel and pulled up above the anchor by a rope and pulley to a height of seven feet. Though apparently used in civilian shops, along with another hammer swung sideways and known as a monkey, these innovations are not mentioned in the Portsmouth records.³ The method there must have been like the finishing process described in the late eighteen seventies.

¹ Ibid. pp 30 - 33.

² Ibid.

³ Steel op.cit.

Illustration 2.14 Anchormaking



"This portion of the work ... is one of the most arduous labours of the smiths shop, as the workmen are unable to stand the intense heat of the huge mass of red hot metal and wield ponderous sledge hammers employed but for a short space of time, each strikes his blow and falls back to make room for another, who in turn retires to give place again to his predecessor, and so on until the iron becomes too cool for further hammering. This evidently requires a considerable share of strength, activity, and endurance on the part of the men who are not only compelled to strike while the iron is hot, but have to put in as many and as heavy strokes as they possibly can in the time."¹

The blows were directed by the foreman who had charge of the fire judging its heat and that of the metal. It took twenty men about a month to make the largest anchors.²

Another feature of the dockyard smithy was described in a local guide book. It was said of the bellows that they,

"are so large as to require a windlass, and a man who is partly suspended by slings under his arms, aids the working of them by standing upon two and pressing one down with his foot alternatively as the other rises."³

All the guides echo the simile coined by a writer of 1775 who said that the smiths shop,

"... strikes the spectator at first view with the remembrance of the fabulous story of the forge of Vulcan, and the workmen bring to his recollection the figures of the Cyclops."⁴

However, the sweating and fire-baked figures were only too human and their labour must have taken a fearful toll of their health. Only the fittest men could stand the heat of the main fires and several smiths were demoted from working at the largest fires at their own request.⁵ Saxton said that he had been told, and partly believed, that when the

¹ E. Knight The Practical Dictionary of Mechanics I (1877) p.94
² In 1814 the Navy Board were arranging with Boulton and Watt to equip the Woolwich smithery with two steam engines to provide power for blowing the fires and running two tilt hammers.
J. Tann The Development of the Factory (1970) 9.83.
³ The History of Portsmouth (c. 1800)
⁴ The Portsmouth Guide (1775).
⁵ NMM POR/A/49 17.12.1800.

smiths were absent for a day or so it was because they laid in bed all day trying to "recruit".¹ In summer the largest anchor fires had sometimes to be abandoned altogether.² One man was thought to be exceptional for it was said he,

"... has not lost a single day by idleness a very unusual case in any branch but particularly that of a Blacksmith."³

Even the length of the smiths' days was abnormal, as the Resident Commissioner reported:

"It appears to me extraordinary that any time seventeen and a half (sic) at so slavish a Trade - should not have been deemed as almost beyond the powers of Man for a continuance, although I understand that even that number of hours in attention is in some degree necessary when employed on Great Anchor work - which is pretty much the case now - but that a Remission of some time might be allowed when employed otherwise."⁴

The smiths normally worked their dinner hour and a certain number of them had to come to work early to light the fires. It is no wonder that the Commission of Revision reported that,

"It has been found by experience a much greater difficulty has existed in procuring Boys for Apprentices to Smiths, than to any other trade and that a greater allowance has been always made to them by their Masters out of their wages."⁵

Besides their wages the smiths also received an allowance of strong beer which was essential to prevent dehydration. Also, they were allowed to keep the moulds they used, until this perk was replaced by the chips money.

Undermanned, and faced with an ever growing demand for iron manufactures the men of the smithy probably had to work harder and more continuously than any of the Navy's civilian employees, other than the ropemakers.

1 NMM POR/D/26 18.6.1808

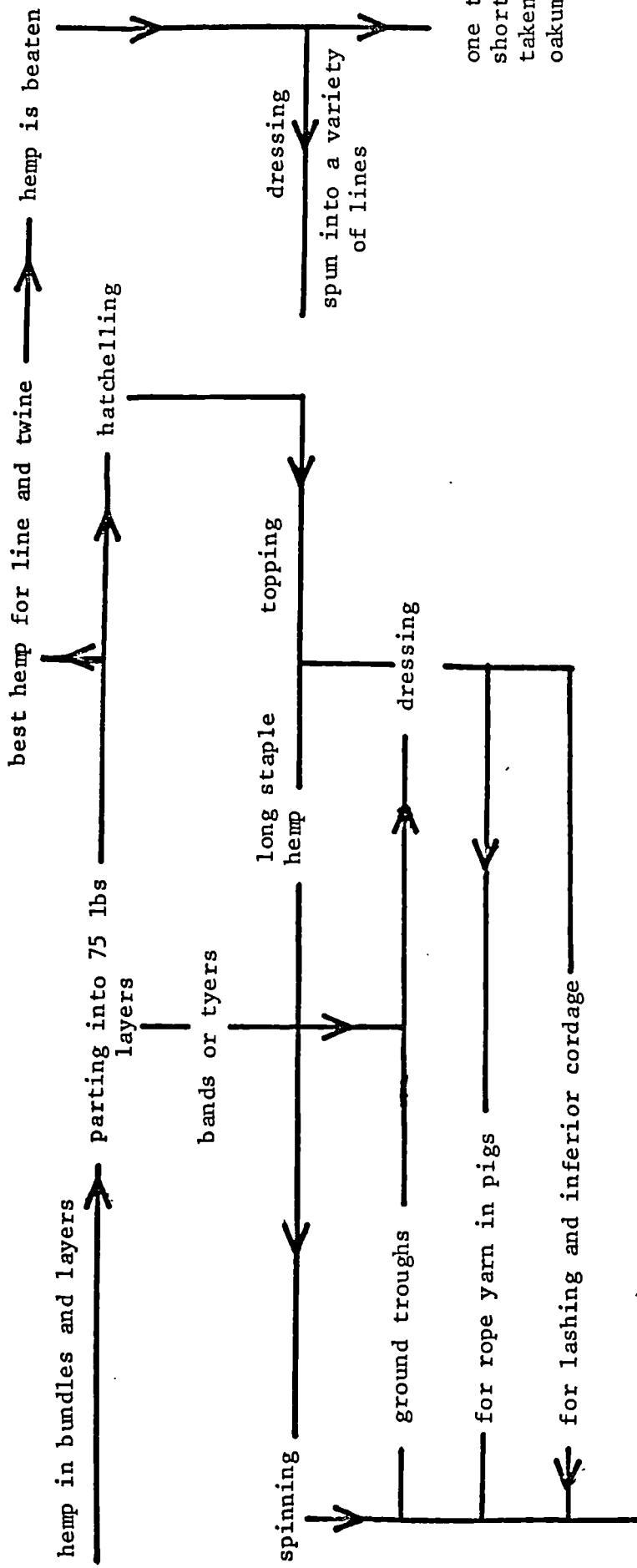
2 NMM POR/11/28 12.10.1810

3 NMM POR/F/21 26.4.1795

4 NMM POR/D/30 22.10.1813

5 NMM POR/F/30 20.10.1803 ; NMM POR/A/50 4.12.1807

NMM POR/A/ 10.12.1800



eighteen threads, one hundred and seventy fathoms per day
four hundred threads, twenty subdivisions of four threads warped into hauls

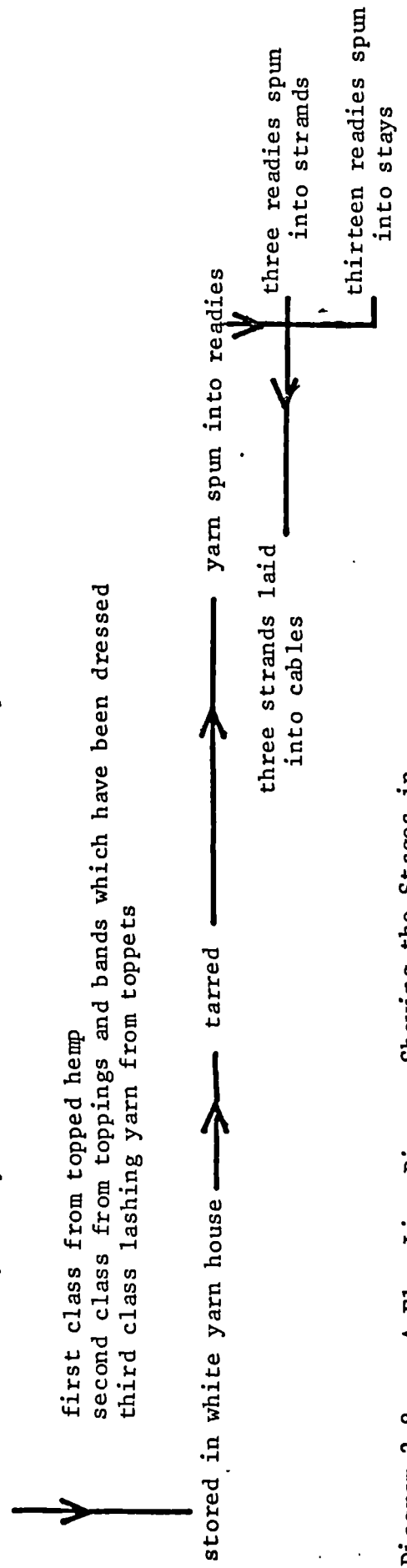


Diagram 2.8

A Flow Line Diagram Showing the Stages in the Manufacture of Rope.

The Ropemakers

In this outline of the activities of the King's Rope Yard in Portsmouth it is intended to briefly parallel the conditions experienced by the workers there with those of their civilian counterparts.

It is easy to overlook the fact that, before the days of steel cable, rubber and synthetic fibres, hempen rope and twines were vital to the daily workings of many occupations. Their manufacture took place all over the country, in small rural ropewalks, coastal ropeyards and great urban manufacturies. The Government Dock Yards, however, were the only shipbuilding establishments to contain their own roperies. The basis for the ropemaking industry was hemp, the importation of which reached significant proportions. In 1801 30,000 tons of hemp were worked up; the value of imports was over £630,000. One of the largest consumers of these imports was the Navy.¹

Portsmouth Rope Yard consisted of a number of buildings located in the Dock Yard and not distinguished from it by any boundary. The administration of the ropery was in the hands of the Master Ropemaker and the Clerk of the Rope Yard. Their main responsibility was the double rope-house, two adjoining buildings about 1,000 feet long. A similar, but undoubtedly smaller, building was described by Longfellow:

"In that building long and low,
with its windows all arow,
Like the port-holes of a hulk
Human spiders spin and spin,
Backward down their threads so thin
Dropping each a hempen bulk.

¹ W. Chapman A Treatise on the Progressive Endeavours to improve the Manufacture and Duration of Cordage (1808).
G. Jackson, Hull in the Eighteenth Century (1972) p.131
Hemp was, ton for ton, as valuable as tobacco.
J. Oddy European Commerce (1805).

At the end an open door;
Squares of sunshine on the floor
Light the long and dusky lane;"¹

Associated with this were a number of hemp stores, a hatchelling house and tarring house. Compared to most civilian concerns, the King's Rope Yards would appear to have been very large, though the comparison is not easy to make for lack of information about the former. Details of one civilian manufactory employing eighty three people, compared to Portsmouth's establishment of three hundred, are given in the papers of Simon Goodrich, the new Yard engineer.² This plant probably belonged to Grimshaw of Sunderland, a well known northern industrial innovator and a friend of Goodrich.³ One of the most significant differences between Grimshaw's workforce and that at Portsmouth was that eighty percent of the former were women; no female labour was to be found in any department of the Dock Yard though their employment was considered in 1805.⁴ This feature points to a major distinction between government establishments and the largest of the private concerns. The largest civilian works were far more mechanised, therefore allowing the employment of females. Rope Yards near to Portsmouth, however, were modest affairs. It was reported that at best they were only partially covered, though the largest was twelve hundred feet long.⁵

The process of ropemaking was a laborious one and the material required much handling. The steps involved in the process are summarized in a flowline diagram (Diagram 2.8).

¹ H.W. Longfellow The Rope Walk (1854).

² Simon Goodrich Papers. Paper No.61. ~~See below p.~~

³ NMM POR/A/50 7.10.1810.

⁴ E.A. Forward Simon Goodrich as an Engineer Part 1 1796-1805.
Transactions of the Newcomen Society (1922) pp 1-15.
NMM POR/A/ 27.12.1805.

⁵ NMM POR/D/26 1808.

Hemp arrived at the Dock Yards in ships from the Baltic during the late summer. After harvesting the initial preparatory processes, retting, soaking and drying, had been carried out, Packaging for shipping was in the form of layers of seven to fourteen pounds which were made up into larger bundles.¹ The best hemp came from Riga, the next quality from Petersburg, true hemp being known as "soft" and substitutes as "hard" hemp.² Apparently the navy topped Petersburg hemp.³ Small and occasional quantities of material were sometimes drawn from other sources of supply such as Italy and Chile.⁴ The raw hemp had to be unloaded from the ships and carried into the stores. All ropemakers turned out for this duty and additional labour was sought. This was a time of intense effort, for the vessels had to be cleared in time for them to return to collect a second cargo. There were often labour disputes.⁵ The senior officers of the different Rope Yards reported in 1802:

"We are of the opinion that twelve spinners are sufficient to receive hemp and that having the assistance of twenty six labourers eighteen Tons will be a fair days work when the cargoes are in a state to allow of being received Task, but as soon as the cargo is found wet or heated, we propose that this Task should immediately cease, and the men employed by the day. We think it would be a good regulation that the same men should receive the whole cargo and that when the Dock Labourers are employed with the Ropemakers they should conform to the hours established for the Ropeyard.⁶ Two teams of horse will be required for this task."

These recommendations were not adopted; for in 1807 the ropemakers were complaining that they lost money when unloading hemp. The Resident Commissioner recommended that they be paid the same as the men working in the house, but the Navy Board said that Task should be used where possible.

1 SM. S.G. Memo 1.7.1802
 2 A. Rees *op.cit.*
 3 NMM POR/D/27 18.3.1796
 NMM POR/A/66 5.5.1815
 4 NMM POR/G/2 19.8.1807
 5 See Chapter III
 NMM POR/G/2 15.8.1807
 6 NMM POR/A/50 2.9.1807

The 1802 proposals were adopted, the men being paid the daily average earnings of their colleagues in the ropehouse when they had to handle damaged material.¹ Wet hemp was liable to spontaneous combustion. If the weather turned bad, work, therefore, had to stop.² If the weather was good, a maximum of forty five tons per ship could be cleared in a day.³ The foremen also lost money at this time of year, a half to a whole day's pay.⁴ The job was made more difficult because the hemp was not stored in one place but in a number of makeshift stores all over the Yard.⁵

Before use, the raw material had to be broken out of its bundles and sorted. This was done by parters, mainly boys, who had to cut the bands, 'tyres', which secured the hemp. It was then sorted by quality into parcels of about seventy-five pounds apiece called 'proper layers'. This was light duty that was given to infirm and old ropemakers. Eight bundles was a day's work and one parter supplied two toppers or hatchellors.

The job of the latter was to straighten the staple of the hemp by combing them over rows of iron spikes a foot in length. Topping also removed the short staple, which was set aside; hatchelling left it in. To ease this process, the toppers rubbed train oil into the hemp with their hands (this also helped spinning). With the waste removed the prepared bundles weighed 64 lbs. and one bundle was material for a day's spinning by one man. Hatchelling had been given up by the Navy about 1776, but experiments were made with hatchelled material after this date.

1 NMM POR/A/50 1808
 2 NMM POR/F/28 28.8.1807
 3 NMM POR/D/28 20.7.1807
 4 NMM POR/D/28 26.8.1807
 5 NMM POR/F/30 24.6.1810

Note to illustrations 2.I5 and 2.I7

Steel shows the process of spinning and the laying of a small rope. The spinner is to the left of the top picture. The middle scene is of the tarring house. At the bottom are shown various pieces of ropemaking equipment.

The laying of a larger rope is shown in illustration 2.I7. The artist has reduced the overall length of the ropehouse for demonstration purposes. Among the detailed views of the equipment are shown the top (T) and woolders (H And K). Steel's equipment is rather more sophisticated, particularly the sledge for ropelaying and the means whereby its forward movement was retarded.

Practice of Ropemaking with the Tools.

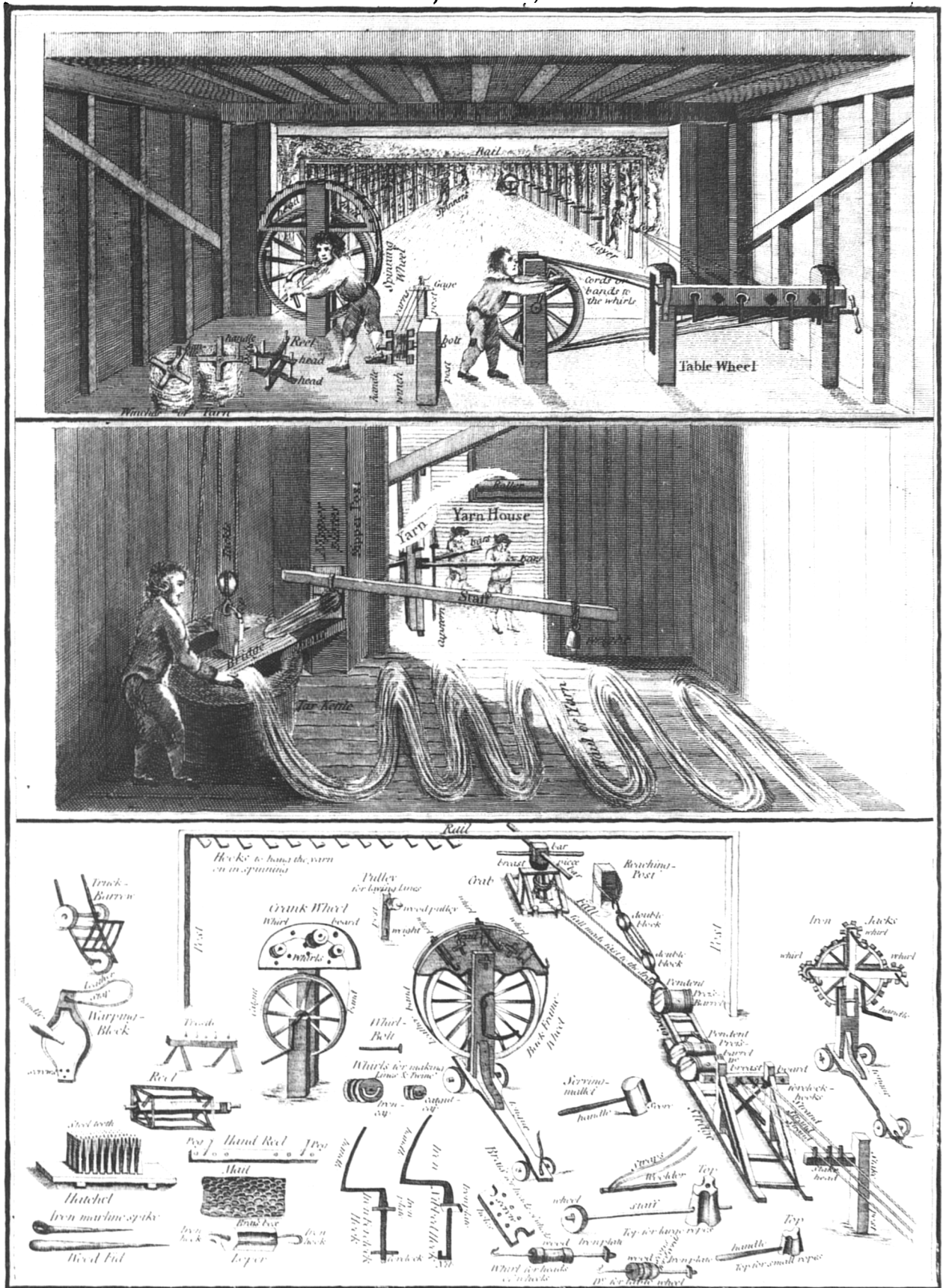


Illustration 2.15 Ropemaking (see the note on page 206)

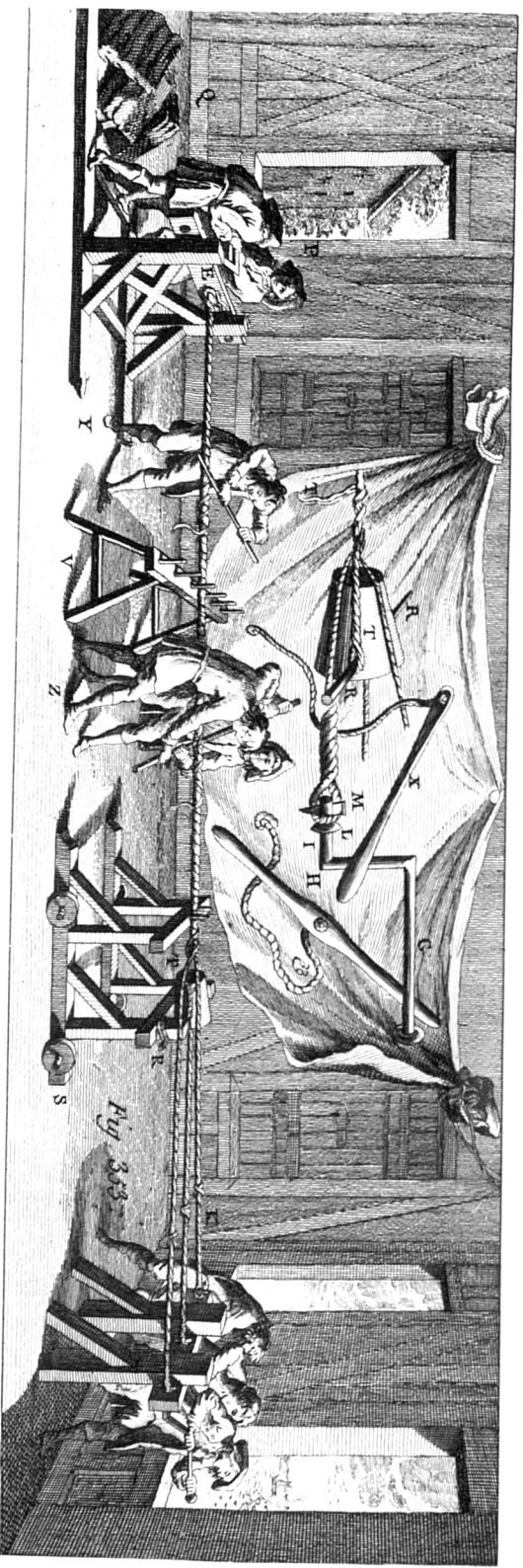
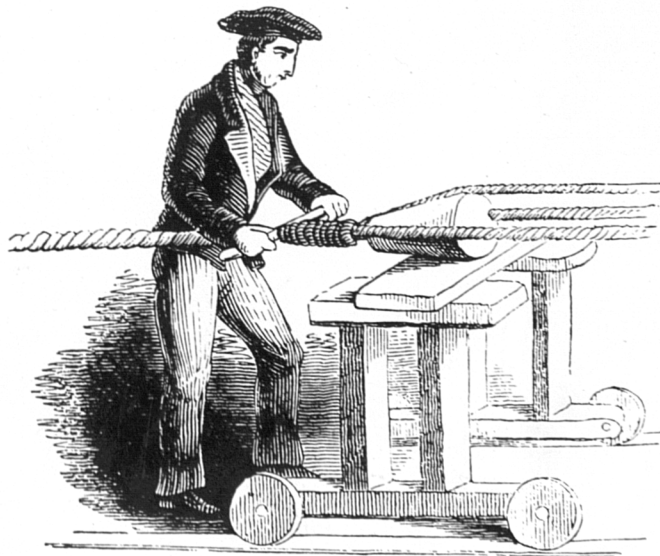


Illustration 2.17 Rodelaying (see the note on p)

Illustration 2.16 A spinner:note the hemp around his waist.



Illustration 2.18 A woolder following the top.



Another trial was made in 1807, when the weight of the bundles that the hatchellors had to work was also reduced from 70 lbs to 65 lbs.

Hatchelling put a lot of dust and fine particles into the air which probably caused a respiratory complaint common among many hemp workers.¹

The material removed by hatchelling, the toppets, was also used, being sent to the dressers for preparation over another, but finer, hatchel or cag. The tyres were similarly processed, as was the hemp dropped by the spinners. The material was sorted by quality into lots for making up into cordage yarn and inferior lashings. Rather more oil was used in dressing than in topping. The best of the Riga hemp was never sent to the toppers but beaten by a labourer employed by the dressers, who then removed the short staple. The waste was made into oakum, the rest was used by the line and twine spinners.

Spinning, the next stage in the process, required the greatest skill. This was a very ancient technique and was in general use in ropemaking until the late eighteenth century, (see Illustrations 2.15 and 2.16), not being totally superseded until the twentieth century.²

At one end of the ropewalk was set a spinning frame

"These frames consisted of a large hand-turned wheel mounted on a vertical post at the top of which was a bow-shaped frame with revolving hooks or whirls mounted along it. These were driven by a cat gut from the hand wheel, each spinning frame having eight whirls, one each spinner."³

One man attended each frame to splice and set the hemp on the wheels.⁴

¹ NMM POR/D/27 6.1.1797

² SM S.G. Memo op.cit.

³ H.W. Dickinson 'A Condensed History of Ropemaking' Transactions of the Newcomen Society 23 (1942-43) pp.71-91.

⁴ J. Coad 'Chatham Rope Yard' Post Medieval Archaeology III (1969) pp.143-165.

"The spinner takes the hemp at one end of the walk, a little more than enough for 2 threads. When they come back they take a fresh quantity of hemp. The threads when spun are taken from the whirls and led round (and) fixed at one end round a hook that can revolve at the other. The threads are spliced end to end of each other, in such a manner as to form a spiral around the hook, like a skein of thread round a reel. A separation of each 4 threads, then of each twenty, is made by knotting a piece of thread round these. Twenty twenties or 400 make a haul to which a degree of twist is given by the hook that revolves by means of a winch, after which it is taken to the white yarn house and coiled up, ready to be tarred."¹

The spinner regulated the hardness of the thread by applying pressure to the hemp as it passed through his hand. The thickness was controlled by the speed at which the spinner walked and the rate at which the wheel was turned. A skilled man could judge exactly how to produce a given length of yarn from any weight of hemp, making about a thousand feet of yarn in twelve minutes (see Illustration 2.16).

The process of twisting the hauls of spun yarn was called warping

"The usual method is to warp the yarn either in whole or half hauls which is done by putting the number of threads you mean to draw down at once in a bite, into a block with one sheave (the one end of the bite of yarn being fast at the upper end) which being drawn down and fixed over the end of a hook made fast to a post at one hundred fathoms distance from the warping post, forms when opened a length two hundred fathoms ..."²

Two men drew the yarn out to its proper length and a third kept the yarn tight and in place. Before tarring, the hauls were stored in the white yarn house, where twelve men were employed in coiling, a difficult task.

In a day a spinner would have to walk miles feeding out the hemp which he carried wrapped around his waist. The spinners also prepared white oakum for the caulkers and alternated with working on the laying floor.³

¹ SM S.G. Memo op.cit.

² A. Rees op.cit.

³ NMM POR/D/30 22.10.1813
NMM POR/A/51 9.5.1808

A haul required ten men to carry it to the tarring house where it was payed into a large kettle full of hot tar (see Illustration 2.16). Care was needed in order to prevent the hemp from being damaged by over-heating and to make the tar penetrate it, which meant that the temperature of the tar was critical.¹

"The common practice of ropers is to bring the tar to a gentle boil, so as to throw scum upon a considerable and connected part of its surface before and during their passing the yarn through it."²

In 1814 this process became more scientific when a thermometer came into use and careful regulations concerning tarring were laid down.³

To maintain the heat in the kettle it was kept covered. Surplus tar was pressed out of the yarn as it was drawn from the kettle. In 1814 a steam engine was erected in the tar house for drawing the yarn through the tar.⁴ In his plate David Steel shows this being done by means of a capstan. In this case the material is pulled straight from the white yarn store.⁵ At the time it was suggested that the new steam engine in Portsmouth could also be used to drive the spinners' wheels. The tarred yarn was left to dry in the black yarn house.

Tar was widely used in the Dock Yard. Besides ropemaking, it was also utilised in caulking and in sailmaking; it had its own dangers. The variety of tar favoured by the Navy was from the Baltic and it was the likely cause of skin infections. One writer reported that:

"Stockholm tar and that from Archangel are more corrosive than American tar as every workman who has occasion to have his hands smeared by it will have experienced by the effect upon his skin."⁶

1 NMM POR/D/30 22.10.1813

A. Rees op.cit.

2 W. Chapman op.cit.

3 POR/A/57 29.4.1814

4 POR/A/57 4.3.1814

5 D. Steel op.cit.

6 W. Chapman op.cit. p.50.

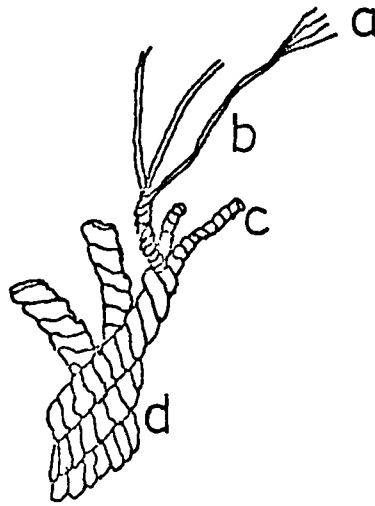


Diagram 2-9

A sketch showing the composition of a cable laid rope

As tar had to be heated for use, minor burns were probably frequent.

After the yarn had been prepared the next process was that of laying the rope. But before describing this, it would be best to mention, briefly, another of the spinners' activities, the making of lines and twines. These were used for a variety of purposes: sailmaking, strapping blocks, log lines and so on. The line spinners had twelve threads of 1,560 fathoms each for a day's work. An ordinary spinner's task was eighteen threads of 170 fathoms each.¹

At its simplest, laying is the twisting of strands of hemp together to form a rope. In practice there were many sophistications. The first process was to take two or more threads of hemp yarn (see Diagram 2.9)(a) and twist them into a strand called 'a ready'(b). Three readies were then twisted together to form 'a strand proper'(c) and three strands were then taken to form a cable (d). This was the salvage system of ropemaking and was in common use, the size of the cable being determined by the number of strands included in the ready. Hawser-laid ropes contained three subdivisions, instead of the cable's nine. Stays for supporting the masts of ships, had thirteen three-strands wrapped around a ready.²

The equipment for laying ropes at the beginning of this period was quite primitive, designed simply to achieve and maintain the necessary tension (see Illustrations 2.14 and 2.16). The spun yarns were attached at both ends to three hooks, those at the top of the ground were set in the centre of three small cogged wheels (whirls), which in turn were set at the twelve o'clock, three o'clock and nine o'clock points of a larger cogged wheel; so that by turning a handle in the middle of the large

¹ NMM POR/D/28 17.11.1810
SM. SGP's Memo op.cit.

² Ibid.

wheel, the three hooks could be made to revolve. The hooks to which the other end of the hemp was attached were fixed in the same horizontal plane on a stout structure known as a breast board. This was mounted on a sledge and it was by drawing this back by means of a capstan and weighting it that the necessary tension was created. The yarn was kept off the ground by a number of trestles which had pegs set in their heads so as to keep the strands separate. The strands were formed by revolving the hooks at both ends of the yarn until the sledge was dragged forward. When the strands were judged to be sufficiently hard they were all put on to the same hook on the breast board, but remained on three separate hooks at the other end. The rope was then formed by twisting the strands together. In order to help maintain the tension of the rope a cone of wood with three grooves along it was placed between the strands near the sledge. As the rope closed this, the top was forced towards the tackle board wheels. Woolders were used by men following behind the top to wrap cordage around the rope to prevent it opening and overpowering the men operating the hooks as it unravelled (Illustration 2.18).¹

Goodrich recorded this being done at Chatham, though the technique there was apparently a slightly more sophisticated one than that used in Portsmouth.

"Seventy three men are employed in forming the first three strands of a twenty-four inch cable; twelve men assist in turning the machine in going up. One puts in the Trussels. Fifty-nine men are employed at the fixed power at the upper end in drawing the Machine up, seventy four men close three of these into a cable strand. The three are cut off to their proper lengths of one hundred and fifty fathoms at lower end and placed on the hooks of one of the large closing machines, the fifth or sixth size, and all the men go down from the Upper End excepting thirty and the strand is hardened up by the men at both ends all employed in twisting and woolding till the strand is hard, excepting the layer. It is hardened up eight fathoms before the top is put in. Then the

¹ Rees op.cit.

three strands are put on the middle hook and the top goes in for closing. The thirty men at the Upper End begin to twist, the Top advances and the men at the Lower End twist as many can at the winches, and the woolders assist. The Layer alone manages the Top which advances upon a sledge and one man takes the Trussels down as the Top advances. When the strand is made it is one hundred and eighteen fathoms long. The operation may be repeated till eighteen strands are formed enough for six cables.

Two hundred and twenty men are employed closing (three) of these strands into a cable. The three strands are all hooked onto the great Closing Machine at the Lower End and to three Hooks at the Tackle Board at the Upper and are stretched out by the force of three quarters of the men ... They are then hardened up from the Upper End by the winches and principally by the woolders till they have contracted three fathoms. The Layer is alone employed in tempering the strands, that is keeping them all equally twisted and taut which he ascertains by feeling the vibrations in them. The Top was put in before beginning to harden up. The men now go down to the Lower End which are left at the hooks and woolding the strands at the Upper End. The men at the Lower End are all employed as fast as they can get on as woolders, and turning the winches, excepting the Layer who attends the business going on, two men holding the nippers and six removing the stakes before the Top, and six putting them in after the Top. In carrying the cable away to the storehouse all hands are employed ..."¹(Sic).

It would seem from Goodrich's documents that Chatham's equipment was more advanced than Portsmouth's, but innovation had made its mark there as well.

The first attempt at modernization was not very successful. Mr. Seymour's new machine had been secretly put into store by the Resident Commissioner.² Trials at Plymouth had been made but there was opposition from the workers.³ Commissioner Saxton referred to the device as a "Horse machine" but the only patents attributed to Seymour makes no mention of horse power, merely stating that:

"Its properties and advantages are that the cables or ropes are made by it in higher perfection, with more strength and accuracy and in less time than the common methods, and with a less number of hands."⁴

1 Quoted in J. Coad op.cit.

2 See Chapter

3 J. Coad op.cit.

4 Br. Patent 1442 (1784); British Patent 1537 (1786). However the Hampshire Chronicle, 19.9.1791, stated that an invention had been successfully used in tarring rope and that a horse machine for laying rope was about to be tested.

The next improvement to be adopted at Portsmouth was a result of the work of J.D. Belfour, a Dane. The machinery described as being at Chatham was that developed by a Mr. Huddart, but his work was very similar to that of Belfour. Both men were very active filing patents in this line. The main feature of these was that the hemp yarns were drawn separately from bobbins held in a frame and funnelled together through what Belfour called a 'top minor' and Huddart a 'register'. The first was a plate pierced by holes arranged concentrically; the register was a metal tube. Though this is mentioned by Goodrich at Chatham there is nothing to suggest that it was used at Portsmouth. Neither method was apparently practical until the inventors brought out improvements in 1799. A contemporary expert said of Belfour's original method, "... the mode of operation was so complex as to prevent its adoption."¹

The same criticism of Huddart's process was also made, though his modifications would seem to be the method in use at Chatham and his system was also used in civilian works in Limehouse, partly in conjunction with steam power.² The innovation that Portsmouth did take up was Belfour's introduction of spinning wheels at both ends of the walk. This meant the men could save time by not having to return to the frame empty-handed. This led to greatly increased productivity; as Saxton noted: "... since the practice of the new methods of spinning backwards and forwards they can at this time of year work 3 for 1 as is done in the Eastwards."³ The last part of the quotation is presumably about the Rope Yards at Chatham and Woolwich and suggests that they had already adopted the new method.

¹ W. Chapman op.cit.

² J. Huddart. Memoir of the Late Joseph Huddart FRS, (1821)
PRO ADM/106/2227 12.6.1801 Huddart's "warm registered cordage"
method was on trial in Portsmouth.

³ NMM POR/F/23 12.1.1799.

Belfour's machinery was not without snags. On one occasion an axle snapped, possibly the result of sabotage,¹ and in 1801 there were complaints about the quality of the cordage made in this mode. The inventor, however, claimed that it was because of the way in which the machinery was being operated.²

Other changes included those in the tarring house, already mentioned, a hemp-breaking machine and in the actual rope-laying process, "Mr Parson's equalizing machine". Parson never patented his device so its exact nature remains unknown. Probably its general function was to maintain an equal tension in all the strands as they were being twisted.³

Despite all these technical advances the work of the ropeyard at Portsmouth clearly remained very hard though not greatly skilled.⁴ Other inventions not taken up by the Navy made for a different picture in civilian works. Of these, two were the work of Huddart, the first being a method of laying rope straight from the tar house. Hot laid cables were used for a while by the Navy but then given up because it was thought that the process damaged the hemp. The second patent was a summary of earlier inventions but put them in a new arrangement. In all, a contemporary survey of rope manufacturing mentions more than twenty-five patents between 1793 and 1807. Besides Huddart and Belfour, the most active patentees were W. Chapman, the author of the study which forms the basis of this examination, and John Grimshaw. It is interesting briefly to consider the activities of the latter because he was a large industrialist and a good friend of Simon Goodrich.

¹ See below p.324

² NMM POR/F/23 12.3.1799

NMM POR/A/44 11.1.1801

³ NMM POR/A/55 28.10.1811

NMM POR/A/50 29.6.1807

⁴ PRO ADM 106 1884 16.5.1807 ; PRO ADM 106 1811 20.8.1807.

Grimshaw took over the works of Richard Fothergill at Southwick on the River Wear. Fothergill had built this manufactory to house heckling, spinning and laying machinery of his own invention patented in 1793. In 1799 Grimshaw filed patents on machinery for dressing hemp, winding yarns, preparing them for tarring and an improved mechanical top. His competitor, Chapman, sourly noted,

"... The works at Southwick are carried on in a house and they keep secret their mode of making strands."¹

As an honoured guest and Bentham's companion, Goodrich, however, was given a guided tour of the establishment and made note and sketches of what he saw.² The information he gives forms an interesting contrast to Portsmouth.

Hemp was unloaded from ships and carried into the factory where it was hauled by tackle to the third floor. Here the sorting process took place, the material being weighed on an automatic balance. The operator then fed the material into the heckling machine which was composed of two spiked sheels one set above the other. The hemp was fed out again on the floor below where it passed through further machines on to the first floor on which the final dressing took place and the spinning was done automatically. Four women and two girls, acting as piecers, looked after twenty four machines. The yarn was drawn on to spindles and then off again for warping; it was then automatically coiled for storing until it was tarred on the ground floor. Drive for the whole establishment was provided by a mill shaft on this floor and transmitted by straps.

Bentham said of Grimshaw's works that it was "... already one of the most complete and best contrived systems of machinery I had seen employed

¹ W. Chapman op.cit. p.22
² S.M. S.G.F. 20.7.1805

for any manufacturing purpose". The Brigadier was considering the introduction of Grimshaw's techniques into the Dock Yards.¹ But as far in advance of Portsmouth as Grimshaw's works were, they were not unique. There are details in Goodrich's papers of two other plants, one at Doncaster, which employed women in a secret process and another belonging to a Mr. Siller, which was apparently powered by steam.² This works used a method of heckling similar to that used in flax processing.

This connection with the textile industry is interesting because it points to a possible explanation for the development of machinery in the ropemaking branch of the shipbuilding industry when similar developments are absent from many of the other sectors. In rope-manufacturing it was possible for technology to be borrowed from allied processes. More weight is given to this proposition by the fact that Edmund Cartwright obtained in 1792 a patent for spinning hemp which formed the basis for all later developments in this line. Another aspect of ropemaking was that its products were not exclusively for maritime purposes. Chance was probably not the determining factor in siting Grimshaw's works in the North East, for there it could supply both the colliers and the collieries. The growth of power-driven machinery also meant that there was an increasing demand for belts and straps.

To return to Portsmouth; after the ropes had been laid and closed they had to be carried to the weighbridge and storehouse.³ Like much of the labour in laying the cables, this could have been done by unskilled labourers. However, to the concern of the Navy Board, little discrimination

¹ M.S. Bentham The Introduction of Steam Engines into Naval Arsenals (1847)
² S.M. S.G. Memo 20.7.1801
 S.M. S.G. Paper No.103.
³ NMM POR/C/1 11.7.1799

was used in this respect and the ropemakers did a lot of work that required little or no skill.¹ The skilled workers would appear to have been anxious to exclude labourers even from unskilled tasks. Those labourers that were in the house were rotated between the various jobs except that of wheel turning.²

The only other aspect of the ropeyard's activities that has to be considered is the use of old rope as raw material for the making of inferior cordage. This became vitally important in 1801 when England was faced with an embargo imposed by the Baltic powers.

The unpicking, sorting and knotting of old yarn was done by boys and aged or sick spinners and probably, like toppets, was spun by old ropemakers, as the process was a slow one.³ Perhaps this was because of the short length of the staple. Toppets were spun in half lengths so as to avoid encumbering the spinners with too large bundles of material. The increased labour required in making twice laid rope was recognised by the Navy Board and they permitted an increase in the number of men allocated any rope when it was of old yarn.⁴ Waste material was sold off as 'paper stuff' though part was sent out to the poor-house for making into oakum.

With such a complex range of activities within the ropeyard it is clear that the system of payment used would be just as complicated. This was made worse because, as a result of their highly laborious duties, the ropemakers' hours were not the same as those of the dockyard.

1 NMM POR/A/2 28.11.1803
 2 NMM POR/D/30 22.10.1813
 3 NMM POR/A/ 10.12.1800
 NMM POR/F/30 20.10.1803
 NMM POR/A/50 4.12.1807
 4 NMM POR/A/ 2.2.1801

Because so much of the Rope Yard's work was very arduous the stints of work were particularly short, especially those of the ropelayers. The Master Ropemaker at Plymouth told a Parliamentary enquiry that layers could do a day's work in three hours and spinners in three to four.¹ In 1795 it was stated that the ropemakers were leaving Portsmouth Yard at 12 o'clock, after completing three days work.² However, this it would appear was unusual. In 1809 spinners were doing three days work, for one, and finished at 4.30. Even so, they were not working their dinner hour.³ It was normal for the 'Rope House people' to work beyond dinner time. When it was proposed to allow them to go out at dinner time the Rope Yard Officers objected, saying,

"... we are aware from their various habits and dispositions many will absent themselves for the afternoon ... and as most part of Ropemaking is extremely laborious, it is to be expected that after breaking off for Meals and going home even the well disposed will not always be inclined to return."⁴

The work of the ropemakers was always hampered by available daylight. As it was considered too dangerous to have artificial lights in the Rope House, working hours were cut back in winter. To overcome this the Navy Board ordered the ropemakers to come into the Yard at 7 am., so as to be ready for work when it got light. In addition the ropelayers also frequently worked on Sundays, though the spinners and dressers did not have much extra.

Ropemaking appears to have combined semi-skilled work, great and intense labour of short duration and fairly high earnings. Civilian employers, however, could outbid the Navy for this sort of workman.

¹ Quoted in E. Berckman op.cit.

² NMM POR/F/21 29.7.1795

³ PRO ADM 106 1885 25.9.1809 ; NMM POR C 26 3.1.1811

⁴ NMM/POR/F/31 6.12.1810

The Mills

So far, the various departments of the Dock Yard which have been considered are those that existed throughout the eighteenth century and which involved traditional skills. It has been seen how some innovations were being made in the Rope Yard, yet in Portsmouth at least, even this occupation was recognisably the same in 1815 as in 1790.¹ Slow though the Dock Yard was in keeping up with the technological advances that were transforming old industries and creating new ones, the turn of the century brought developments that put Portsmouth Yard in the forefront of the industrial revolution, in some respects at least.

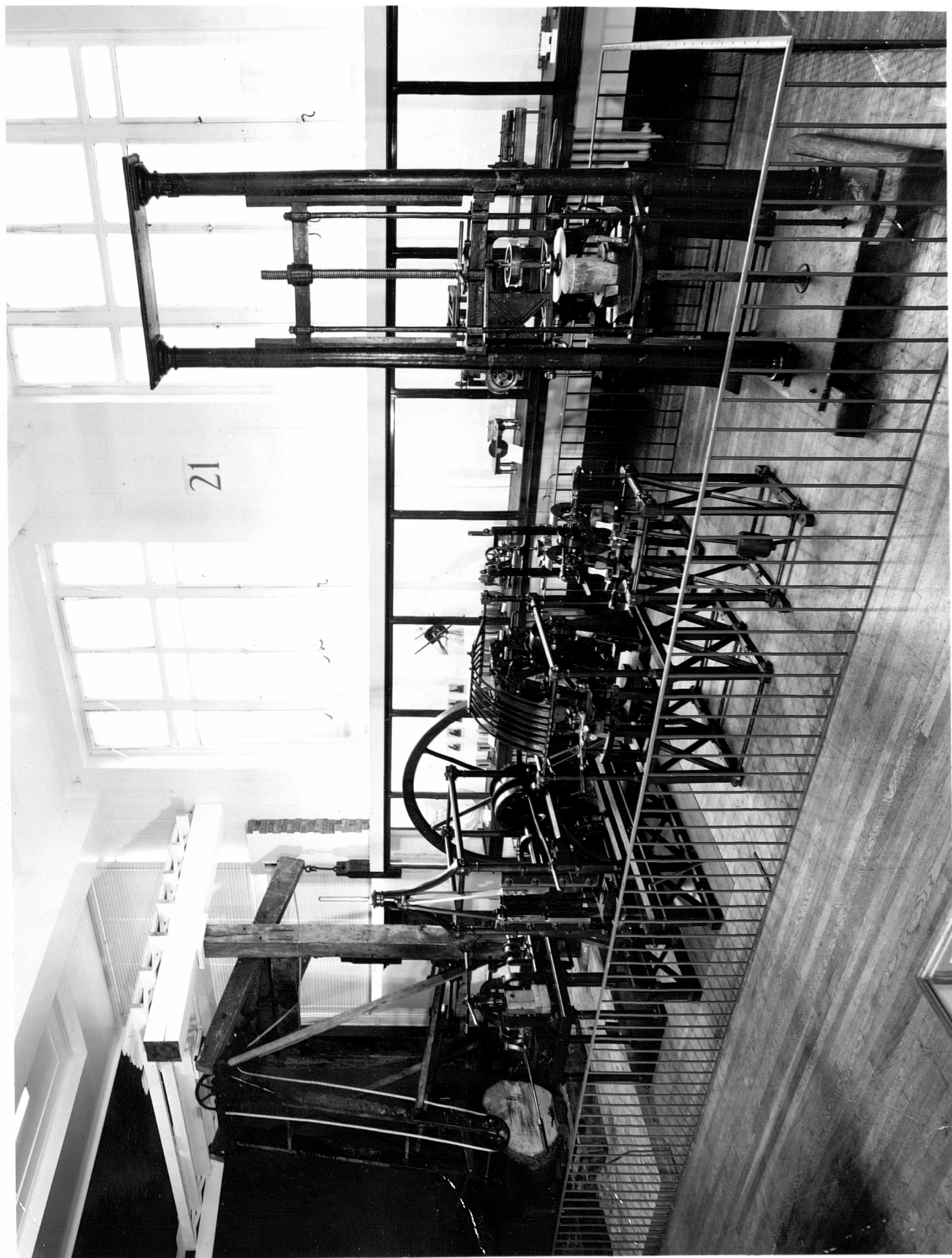
The modernization policy of the Dock Yard was under the direction of the Inspector General of Naval Works, General Bentham, who brought the Navy in contact with the leading engineers of the day.² Steam power came into the Yard in 1799 when a Sadler engine was set up to pump water from the docks. In 1801 Boulton and Watt finished erecting a 30 horse power engine. Other steam engines included a mobile one with a wooden boiler and another built by Murray and Fenton Wood. Chains and pumps for the early machines were provided by Lloyd of London and William Maudsley built the equipment designed by Marc Brunel for making blocks. The development of steam mills for manufacturing wood and processing metal brought new trades and skills to the Dock Yard and created problems for the administration.³

¹ See J. Coad op.cit. for a description of a more advanced Rope Yard at Chatham.

² M.S. Bentham op.cit.

³ E.A. Forward. "Simon Goodrich and his work as an Engineer Part I" Transactions of the Newcomen Society III (1922) p.1-15. Part II Ibid 18 (1937-38) pp 1-27. E.A. Forward "Drawings in the Simon Goodrich Collection 1795" At the Science Museum London. Transactions of the Newcomen Society 19 (1938-39) pp 249-65. A.S. Crossley Part II (1813-23) Ibid. 32 (1959-60) pp 79-91. K.R. Gubert op.cit. R. Hills Power in the Industrial Revolution. J. Tann op.cit. A.E. Musson and E. Robinson Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution (Manchester 1969). R. Beamish The life of Sir M.I. Brunel (1862) pp 79, 80, 84; for the problems that millwrights posed employers.

Illustration 2.19 Brunel's blockmaking machinery



The type of labour that the Dock Yard had to find was basically of three kinds. First, machine operators had to be obtained to make blocks. This meant that virtually new skills had to be created, for there was no comparable occupation from which men could be drawn. Blocks had previously been made by Southampton contractors, either by traditional handicraft methods or by horse-driven machinery. Brunel's steam-powered mass production machinery was something entirely new (Illustration 2.19). As blockmakers of the old sort could not be obtained the Yard trained house carpenters and their labourers as machinists, paid at a rate that was increased as the training was completed. The method of labour recruitment for both the wood and the metal mills was to take men into the mills for a trial period and only retain them if they proved suitable. It would appear that, under Bentham and his aides, some approach to scientific labour management was made, in this simple method of testing aptitude for a revolutionary new type of work. When blockmaking was fully established in 1806, piece rates were introduced.

Brunel's machines excited his contemporaries, and even today his drawings have a fine ^esthetic quality. For the workmen, however, as the machines lacked safety guards, they posed a real threat. That there was a considerable risk from flying pieces of wood is shown by the fact that the Yard found it worthwhile to screen the woodmill windows by means of a metal mesh, the workmen having to take their chance.¹ Undoubtedly wooden shipbuilding was a highly hazardous occupation, but the introduction of high speed steam-powered machinery must have added to the risk of injury to the workmen quite considerably, especially as the Dock Yards

¹ NMM POR/A/49 3.5.1806.

were noted for the crowding of materials and machines.

To build and maintain its new machines the Dock Yard required the services of a second new type of labour, the millwrights. Originally the Navy contracted for millwrights with Lloyds of Whitechapel, who sent workmen to the Yard.¹ It was these men that the Navy took into its own employ, so that in this instance the Navy did not have to train its own operatives; yet it had troubles of another kind with the millwrights which are considered in the chapter on labour disputes.² One point, however, can be made here and that is in respect to hours; for the millwrights brought with them their civilian norms which clashed with the discipline of the Yard.

The millwrights' working day, as laid down in their club rules, was 10 hours but it should be noted that this was only in summer and when daylight permitted, overtime was also worked.³ This casts further doubt on the idea of a 10 hour norm for the working day. Almost alone among the skilled workmen employed in the Dock Yard, the millwrights appear to have been paid on a flat day rate. The impression one gains from the Yard records is that the work of the millwrights was something of a mystery to the Yard Officers and it was perhaps for this reason that no attempt was made to create a piece rate system. As a servicing department, the millwrights had, on occasion, to work irregular hours, repairing and maintaining machines when they were not used. Early steam engines and their attendant plant were not reliable and work was often halted because of a snapped cog or loose gudgeon. In 1804 the Master of the Woodmills wrote to Goodrich, the Yard Engineer:

¹ NMM POR/A/49 22.12.1802

² S.M. S.G.P. No.151 19.7.1805

See p.367

³ S.M. S.G.P. Rules of the Journeymen Millwrights.

"I have to inform you that the Boiler of the steam engine is in a very bad plight this morning. We could not get to work till 9 o'clock. The men say that the Boiler was near or quite empty when they came to get up steam and we have been obliged to stop ten or a dozen times this day while they raised steam."¹

The blame for interruptions could not always be put on the engines, for unskilled supervision played its role. When a new foreman was appointed it was reported that in seven weeks the steam engine had not stopped for longer than half an hour, a thing never known before.² Despite accidents, steam power brought a new regularity to industrial working. Uncontrolled by wind or tide, steam enabled the Dock Yard to work throughout the night and in 1807 a shift system was introduced into the metal mills.³

Founders and metal rollers comprise the third new type of skilled workmen recruited by the Navy. Again they were drawn from civilian employ. Simon Goodrich was unscrupulous in poaching labour from civilian firms, bringing workmen with the promise of high wages, coals for their homes and travelling expenses for themselves and families. In 1805 Goodrich was called to face the Navy Board over complaints that men had been, "... seduced away from Temple Mills by the Offer of double wages and by such means as no manufacturer of any character in the Kingdom would have adopted."⁴

A month later the owners of Temple Mills were still complaining but Goodrich was unconcerned, writing in his journal,

"I shall leave all parties to chew the cud of resentment and take no notice of this latter being well satisfied I have done a good thing for the services."⁵

¹ Quoted in E.A. Forward Part I op.cit.
² NMM POR/F/31 28.6.1811
³ NMM POR/G/2 2.5.1807
⁴ S.M. S.G.P. 20.12.1805
⁵ S.M. S.G.P. 27.1.1806

The Yard's need for skilled labour was so great that an officer was even sent to make a tour of the Midlands and normal entry regulations about physical fitness were waived.¹ One man was entered even though it was noted, "he (as is the case very frequently with Founders) has had his legs burnt". Here we see one of the hazards of work in the metal mills, another being high working temperatures.² Goodrich noted in the summer of 1807: "Men at the Metal Mill several of them do not stand the work well this hot weather one had lately died thro' drinking cold water."³

Work in the metal mills, founding iron and copper, and rolling it into bars and sheets, was paid for by the piece, a price being set per ton or hundred weight. The men involved worked as a gang and their earnings were divided among them according to function.⁴ The same rate of payment was fixed for both day and night work.⁵ It seems clear from the records that the workgangs had a very strong family basis, so that when the Yard secured one worker he brought others, his sons and brothers, with him.

The millwrights, though representing a new technological era, shared with the other Dock Yard artisans the status of craftsmen. Now we will turn to the labourers who were at best semi-skilled.

1 S.M. S.G.P. 8.11.1805
 2 NMM POR/C/26 19.8.1812
 3 S.M. S.G.P. 17.8.1807
 4 S.M. S.G.P. Nos. 256, 267.
 5 NMM POR/A/58 13.7.1814

The Labourers

Even among the unskilled workers in the Yard, certain broad divisions in responsibility and status are discernible, the most distinct group were the scavemen. Working closely with the shipwrights in building, repairing and coppering ships, they also had other special tasks maintaining the docks, basins, pounds and Yard drains. Scavemen were also responsible for opening and closing the docks and pumping them dry. As this depended on the tide, they sometimes had to work at night. It was natural that this sort of workman should also assume responsibility for digging wells and manning the Yard's steam-powered dredger when it was introduced. Working in mud and water must have been very unpleasant and most of this sort of labour appears to have been paid by the lump. Several times 9/2d a ton was paid for the removal of material.¹ Scavemen were also employed in some of the Yard's boats and in the copper smelter, so that, in all, they can be regarded as a superior and responsible form of labourer, a cut above the other unskilled workmen of the Yard.

The general labourers were involved in very many occupations and therefore experienced a wide range of conditions. They filled the roles of messengers, cleaning staff, watchmen, odd job men and even domestic servants. The Navy Board found it necessary to forbid the Yard Officers to employ labourers as servants in their houses, gardens and stables.² Some years later they were still being used to lay house coals. This the Board permitted to continue in order to prevent strangers and their carts entering the Yard. The Officers, however, had to pay the men for this

¹ NMM POR/A/ 25.5.1798

² NMM POR/A/50 27.6.1807

service out of their own pockets.¹

The main task of the labourers was unloading and moving stores and sorting them out. The handling of materials, once they were landed and housed, was done by the storehouse labourers, who had to provide a bond to ensure their honesty. The bond and the fact that the storehouse labourers worked indoors may have given them a higher status than many of the other labourers, though they suffered several inconveniences.²

Measuring the work done by the Yard labourers involved obvious difficulties and the first approach the Navy Board made to the problem was to copy, from the merchant service, a scheme of task for the storehouse labourers. Five years later, however, the Board were enquiring why the piece-rate system was not being used.³ The Yard Officers explained that actual work done by the storehouse labourers rarely matched that described in the scheme. As it was, the position of the storehouse labourers during wartime was less desirable, than that of a general labourer. They also had to start work an hour before bellringing and still earned less pay than the other labourers.⁴ From 1799, as a result of their complaints, the storehouse labourers were allowed to come to work at six p.m. instead of five. In addition to their wages the storehouse labourers, and some others, received "Presents and Fees" from contractors; though this practice was officially abolished, it continued, illegally, for some time after May 1801.⁵

An attempt to achieve better management of the general labourers was made in 1805, when they were sorted into gangs of twenty, including a

¹ NMM/POR/A/50 27.6.1807

² Besides having to pay a bond, storehouse labourers were under close scrutiny for security reasons. Also, it is likely that working indoors they were more subject to close work discipline than the men outside.

³ NMM POR/A/ 26.9.1793 ; NMM POR/A/ 7.5.1798

⁴ NMM POR/F/23 26.3.1799

⁵ NMM POR/G/1 2.9.1803

foreman.¹ This system, however, was not rigid and on occasion the gangs could be enlarged; this leads to an interesting point that has a more general significance. Labourers were responsible for unloading timber barges; if these were of a type with small hatches the work involved for the labourers was greater than usual and it was necessary for more men to be employed. As this reduced individual earnings a special allowance was paid. This demonstrates how a minor matter of working conditions could have an importance for the individuals that is easily lost in a general survey of their circumstances.² Bearing this point in mind, there may be quite a lot of distinction between the groups of work. The scavelmen appear to have been distinguished by their association with the shipwrights, the riggers labourers were closely allied to the riggers and like painters labourers could hope for promotion without worrying about the bar to a better job created by an exclusive apprenticeship system. But, if these divisions based on a subtle hierarchy of occupational status did exist, the evidence of them has not survived and thus they must escape our scrutiny.

One general point that can be made clearly is the importance to the low earning groups in the Yard of overtime. In 1801 the labourers were reduced to their basic rate, which was 6/6d a week, not enough, the Commissioner warned the Navy Board, for the support of the men and their families and likely to determine the labourers to seek work elsewhere.³ An important supplement to the labourers' day earnings was the shilling a night they could earn standing watch in the Yard. Sir Frederick Eden estimated that this provided the workers with about 2/6d a week.⁴

1 NMM POR/G/2 21.11.1805
 2 NMM POR/G/2 21.11.1805
 3 NMM POR/F/24 26.10.1801
 4 Sir Frederick Eden op.cit.

Though divided for productive purposes into occupational groupings the Yard workmen were employed within a single industrial concern. Therefore, the Yard men shared a number of common work experiences. We turn now to the issues that were matters of concern for most of the craftsmen and labourers. First we consider apprenticeship; clearly this did not involve the unskilled workmen but it might be expected to be of crucial importance to the artisans. When we come to examine hours, wage rates and earnings we will be dealing with topics that were of interest to all the Yard's employees.

The Apprenticeship system

By 1793 the traditional system of apprenticeship had been modified in the Dock Yards. Nevertheless, the Navy Board appears to have upheld apprenticeship more rigorously than the civilian builders.¹ Further, it can be suggested that the workers themselves were not concerned to regulate the apprenticeship system in detail, being mainly concerned with the use of indentures to discourage too many boys from entering the trade. The Navy Board had firm control of apprenticeship in the Dock Yards, maintaining it as a method of ensuring that their workmen had an adequate technical training. It was the Board's policy to refuse to employ men without indentures.² The apprentice system also provided a means of disciplining and rewarding the artificers.³ Apprentices were only indentured to the Yard workmen at the discretion of the Yard officers and with the permission of the Navy Board. Each boy was supposed to be examined by the Resident Commissioner and the Yard Surgeon. Usually the initiative for granting servants, as apprentices were called, came from the Yard authorities, but occasionally a workman might request the "indulgence" of an apprentice. If his character and abilities warranted it, and if the candidate was suitable, the request was usually granted. Preference for entry as an apprentice was normally given to the sons of Yard workers. In 1803 this custom was regularised and the following list of precedence was drawn up.⁴

¹ See below p.275

² N.M.M. POR/C/23. 4.1.1793.

³ N.M.M. POR/D/22. 4.5.1797.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/G/1 12.3.1803.

- 1st. Yard Officers
- 2nd. Shipwrights and Caulkers
- 3rd. Naval Officers
- 4th. Orphans of the above groups
- 5th. Pensioners' children
- 6th. Joiners
- 7th. House Carpenters
- 8th. Bricklayers
- 9th. Sailmakers
- 10th. Smiths
- 11th. Ropemakers
- 12th. Riggers
- 13th. Sawyers
- 14th. Scavermen
- 15th. Riggers' Labourers
- 16th. Yard Labourers
- 17th. Bricklayers' Labourers
- 18th. Ordinary men

If enough boys could not be recruited from these classes then the sons of civilians could be entered.¹

Once indentured the apprentices' activities were still supervised by the Navy Board and the boys did not always work alongside their masters. Sometimes the apprentices were even shoaled into separate gangs supervised by a trained man.² The Board even regulated what part of the apprentice's wage was to go to his master and what part

¹ N.M.M. POR/G/1 9.4.1803.

² N.M.M. POR/A/50 30.10.1807.

to his parents or guardians. The workman, however, was still partly responsible for the boy. Jointly with the parents the master had to pay the indenture costs and look to the boy's welfare and behaviour. In general the legal position of a Yard apprentice and his master was the same as that in civilian employment.

However, after 1803 some changes were made in the Yard apprentice system. As early as 1788 the Commission on Fees and Perquisites had recommended that apprentices should be indentured to the Government and not individual workmen.¹ They also recommended that the master tradesmen in charge of each department in the Yard should not be allowed to take apprentices indentured for high fees. The boys entered in this way were usually marked out for a superior training including learning draftsmanship in the mould loft. It took until 1801 for the Navy to implement the Commissions' recommendations. In May the Yard Officers were forbidden to take apprentices and from November 1802 every apprentice was bound to the principal officer of his trade on behalf of the Government.² An eligible workman was selected to instruct each apprentice, in return for two thirds of the boy's earnings for the first half of his time and half his wages during the second. No apprentice was to be paid more than a day's pay even if he had to work extra with his instructor.³ This rule was modified slightly in 1804 when, in order to "reward" industry and good character, apprentices capable of doing a man's work were allowed piece rates after three and a quarter years of their apprenticeship.⁴ The instructor and the boy's parents were still responsible for paying the indenture fees, though in the case of

¹ CP. 1803-04 (83) III op cit.

² FP. 1806 (312) V 415. op at 181.

³ N.M.M. POR/A/47 7.2.1804.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/A/47 27.2.1804.

hardship the Yard might pay them.¹

Despite the reforms of 1802 the Commission of Revision remained critical of apprenticeship in the Yards.

"The want of education before the apprentices enter in the Dock Yard, and their being totally deprived of the means of obtaining information during their Apprenticeship, renders it next to impossible for the major part of them to obtain such an education as to render them fit to be brought forward for officers." ²

Most boys, admitted at 14 years of age, were unable to read or write. The abolition of the Officers' right to take servants for fees had denied the Yards the opportunity of recruiting better educated boys (i.e. boys of a higher social status). The situation had been made worse in 1802 and 1804 when Foremen and Quartermen were also forbidden to take apprentices. The Commission also claimed that there was now little value in a workman taking on an apprentice unless he was his son. Several recommendations were made with the object of improving the quality of the apprentices. First the Commission suggested a general tightening up of discipline. Second, they suggested that shipwright apprentices be taught caulking, and finally they proposed that a new and superior class of apprentice be created. Most of these recommendations were put into effect. The greatest innovation was the establishment of the superior apprentice in 1810 and the creation of a College of Naval Architecture³. Superior Apprentices were only admitted after sitting a competitive examination.

The Navy's concern with apprenticeship was clearly from the point of view of the technical proficiency of its workmen. That the

¹ N.M.M. POR/G/1 17.2.1803.

² PP. 1806 (312) V 415 op cit.

³ N.M.M. POR/A/5L 10.12.1810.

Navy Board did not exploit its control of the apprentice system to obtain cheap labour can be shown by reference to the following table.

Table 2.4

Table showing the number of shipwright apprentices employed in Portsmouth Dock Yard as a percentage of the shipwrights employed therein.

<u>Date</u>	
1792	12.5%
1804	42.0%
05	
06	
07	27.0%
08	33.0%
09	33.0%
10	25.0%
11	25.0%
12	20.0%
13	
14	22.0%
15	
16	17.0%
17	17.0%
18	20.0%

Sadly our data are incomplete but they do suggest that although the War saw a rise in the proportion of apprentices to workmen, it was not a very significant increase. The high figure for 1804 can probably be explained by reference to the general reforms in Yard

¹ N.M.M. ADM/BP/13-3Cb

administration during the Peace of Amiens when a large number of workers were dismissed. By 1804 the Yard had not yet made good the loss of shipwrights but still had most of the apprentices indentured during the war. This situation may have caused the authorities to watch more carefully the proportion of apprentices in the Yard during the rest of the war. Further, the Yard's recruitment of apprentices had an effect on its recruitment of qualified workers for the Board had an informal commitment to employ its apprentices when they came out of their time. However, this obligation was repudiated when peace returned in 1815 and the man-power needs of the Navy slackened.¹

A high premium was placed on apprenticeship by the Navy Board because of its concern over the skill of its workers. Unfortunately there is no evidence to show whether this attitude was reinforced by the activities of the artificers themselves. Though the Board issued an order forbidding its employees from expelling any workman on pretence of a flaw in his indentures, there is no record of this actually taking place at Portsmouth during our period². Apprenticeship was never an issue of contention between the Yard men and their masters. In the Dock Yards the craftsmen had surrendered the traditional control of the master over his apprentice in return for a supplement to their wages. In any case we can show that in shipbuilding the apprenticeship system had, in many respects broken down,³ but for the moment we must confine ourselves to Dock Yard issues and examine wages and hours.

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/59 17.1.1815. POR/A/59. 30.1.1815.

² N.M.M. POR/A/44 20.5.1801. Even in this case the Navy Board ordered that the suspected man's indentures be examined.

³ See below p 283

Hours, Wage Rates, Earnings and Real Wages

Treble Days, Double Days, Day and half, two for one, Task, Job, Common hours, nights and tides are all terms used in describing the amount of work done by the artificers and labourers of the Royal Dock Yards. They should be carefully defined if they are not to conceal and confuse the Yards' system of payment and hours. The diversity in conditions and pay between the various occupational groups and the obscure and scattered nature of the evidence makes for further difficulty.

Hours

M.A. Bienfeld has recently claimed that a ten hour working day was the norm among many industrial workers at this period.¹ Reference to H.M. Dock Yards shows how important seasonal differences and overtime could be in determining the length of a working day. In the example of Portsmouth Yard, hours frequently varied between fifteen and eighteen a day. In certain trades even these limits were exceeded. There is no reason to think that the Dock Yards were unique in the variability of working hours. It is a general weakness of Dr. Bienfeld's argument that he does not take overtime, slack periods and the length of daylight into account.

In emergencies the whole Yard might find itself working more than usual overtime and a seven day week. Even in normal times some trades worked through their dinner hour; the riggers, ropemakers,

¹ M.A. Bienfeld. Working Hours in British Industry (1972) pp. 286-274

and smiths did so regularly and the sailmakers did in winter.¹

In 1811 the Navy Board ordered that, when necessary, all of the Yard People were to be employed during meal times.² The shipwrights did not object to this happening occasionally but were opposed to it as a general practice.³

A great cause of irregularity in working hours was the need for workmen to do jobs on ships anchored in the roadstead. Time was lost to the Yard because the men had to row out to the vessels. The artificers were inconvenienced if they were on piece rates. They also had sometimes to sleep afloat for several nights running, though they were compensated for this.

Ignoring overtime, the common hours of the Yard during the eighteenth century were, in summer, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with half an hour for breakfast and one and a half for dinner. Winter hours were from bellringing to bellringing which was regulated by the length of daylight, with one break of an hour.⁴ Thus there was a nominal ten hour day during half of the year, but it was at this season that overtime was possible. Moreover, even the ten hour summer norm became subject to pressure. In 1804 the Navy Board attempted to alter working hours so drastically, that even the Yard Officers complained that the new regulations appeared to do away with all former practices.⁵ Dinner time was reduced to an hour all the year round, breakfast was not mentioned at all, and overall hours were extended. From the first of April

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/26, 3.1.1811
N.M.M. POR/D/27 21.5.1798
N.M.M. F/26 2.11.1805
N.M.M. A/26. 2.4.1801

² N.M.M. POR/A/36 2.1.1793

³ see p 375

⁴ D. Baugh op cit p. 310

⁵ N.M.M. POR/D/27. 26.4.1804

to the thirtieth of September work was to start at 5 a.m. and finish at 7 p.m; fourteen hours altogether or thirteen with dinner time. Winter hours were to be six to six as long as daylight permitted, then from bellringing to bellringing.¹ These arrangements appear to have been accepted by the workers without objection, though they did protest when the Board tried to do away with the dinner break.² Perhaps the new regulations made formal the actual hours normally worked. The thirteen hour working day, established by this order, would be the ten hours of summer common hours, plus three hours overtime which it has been said was usually worked in wartime. Also, as will be shown later, this alteration would have had little effect on the men's earnings, so that there may have been no reason for them to be disturbed.³ Yet, in 1805 the old common hours were re-established.⁴ Why this reversion was made is not explained in the Yard records and it is particularly puzzling as less than six months later a basic day of fourteen hours was introduced for the shipwrights. Work was to be from five in the morning to seven p.m.⁵ The men protested, not about the overall hours but about a proposal to reduce the dinner break to an hour. Saxton warned the Navy Board "...I can not help most forcibly recommending the One hour and a half Dinner time - which I am persuaded is indispensable - otherwise I am sure we shall lose more than we shall gain."⁶ The Board took heed of the warning and the required change was made, though the time had to be made up before or after the proposed basic

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/46/ 23.4.1804

² N.M.M. POR/G/2. 3.4.1805

³ see page 244

⁴ N.M.M. POR/G/21.11.1805

⁵ N.M.M. POR/G/2. 11.4.1806

⁶ N.M.M. POR/F/27. 12.4.1806

hours.¹ Further alterations were made when the Dock Yard Officers reported that the shipwrights wanted to work from five a.m. to six thirty p.m. This, the officers thought was advantageous.² In fact, an order was given in April 1806 for work to start at five a.m. and finish at six in the evening.³ As the dinner time remained one and a half hours long, and if breakfast time continued, the shipwrights working day would have been eleven and a half hours. Such arrangements necessitated alterations in the hours worked by the other Yard employees. The smiths were to work a night extra, the caulkers one tide during the dinner break, the other artificers the same hours as the shipwrights.⁴ These arrangements appear to have stood for a number of years for they were reported as the usual hours of the Yard in 1811, with a break called watching time at six p.m. if extra (overtime) was being worked. This statement preceded the last change of hours recorded during this period when, in March 1811, the old time of six to six was established once more.⁵

The Yard's common hours were altered six times in as many years. From 10 hours in 1804 the working day rose to 13½ hours in 1806, but was reduced once more to 10 in 1811. The reason for these alterations are difficult to discern. What appears to have happened is that in formulating general instructions for the Dock Yards the Naval administration attempted to lay down a regular working day, but no account was taken of necessary overtime. In the nineteenth article of the General Instructions drawn up by the Commission of

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/25 9.5.1806
² N.M.M. POR/D/26 10.5.1806
³ N.M.M. POR/C/25 11.5.1806
⁴ N.M.M. POR/F/31. 29.3.1811
⁵ N.M.M. ibid/F/31 31.3.1811

Revision (1805) the standard working day of twelve hours, with breaks of two hours, had been adhered to, and was implemented by the arrangements of 1805. However, objections to so rigid a scheme were soon forthcoming. For instance, it was claimed that if, during winter, the sailmakers started work at eight and also took an hour for dinner they would be obliged to finish their daily stint of work by candlelight.¹ After this, all arrangements were attempts to adjust the working hours of the Yard so that they coincided with the actual time the men were in employment. Why the original hours of 6 to 6 were reverted to in 1811 is difficult to say, but it is possible that the Yard was not under such great pressure at this stage of the war as at an earlier period. Hours of work were therefore reduced. In 1808 the Navy Board ordered that no more Sunday overtime was to be worked, though later in the year this ban was temporarily lifted because of the "present pressure", activity probably associated with the Peninsula Campaign.² As a general rule the Naval authorities were not in favour of Sunday work. For one thing, it was expensive, for another, the Admiralty believed that its workers needed a day's rest for the sake of efficiency and that the Sabbath should be observed for the Lord's sake. To this latter end the Yard People were allowed to go home an hour early on Saturdays at least, until 1811, when the custom, 106 years old, was ended.³

Another Yard custom was the halfday holiday given on quarterly pay days, but these disappeared when weekly wages were introduced. The other holidays of the Yard, as laid down by the Commission

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/25. 18.12.1806

² N.M.M. POR/G/2. 2.12.1808

N.M.M. POR/A/45 5.8.1803

³ Hants Tel. 18.2.1811

of Revision, were the 29th of May, the 5th of November and the Birthday and Coronation Day of the King. Christmas must also have been kept, as was Easter.¹ These holidays were prized by the artizans and labourers and if any fell on a Sunday efforts were made by the workmen to secure another day off, in lieu.² Particular trades may have celebrated their patron Saint's day, for there is one reference to the smiths being paid extra for working on Saint Clements day, 25th November³. Occasional relief from work was also given when the Government declared a Fast Day or Thanksgiving, or when a Royal visitor came to the Yard.

Having established, in broad outline, what hours were actually worked in the Yard, it is now necessary to ask how important these were in determining the amount of work done and the income of the workmen. At this point the whole issue becomes very confused for much of the Yard's work was done, nominally at least, at piece rates and the terms which were used to describe a unit of time were also used as measures of payment and work.

Most of the workmen appear to have been paid in multiples of days, so that artificers and labourers were ordered to work double or treble days, or, to express this in another way, 2 for 1 or 3 for 1. Clearly 20 or 30 hours work was not done and the term day described a stint of work. Thus it could be said that the ropemakers could do a day's work in 3 hours. Day rates remained unchanged throughout the eighteenth century until they were revised in 1809. Overtime, was worked in units of 1½ hours tides, and of 5 hour nights.

¹ PP 1806(8) V 1. Commission for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of the Navy, First Report.

² N.M.M. POR/G/2. 2.6.1808.

³ R. Pering Treatise on the Anchor op cit pp 11-12.

Piece rate working was well established in the Dock Yards but an examination of it reveals that there was more than one system and that at least one of these, was subject to great abuse. A simple scheme of payment by results was in use before 1750 for the ropemakers, sailmakers, sawyers and caulkers doing new work. By the mid-1770s piece-rates had already been extended to other trades but not to the shipwrights, and a scheme was created for them at this date.¹ The best way to try and understand the piece rates of the Yard is to consider each occupational group separately and to relate pay and hours to the type of work each did and the conditions under which it was carried out. Before doing this it is necessary to consider what other elements, besides piece rate earnings, there were in the Yard People's wages.

To its skilled labour the Navy offered a lodgings allowance of 2½d a week and the possible benefit of an apprentice. The actual amount that an apprentice was worth to a workman varied with the year of the apprenticeship that the boy was in. Many workmen had their sons as apprentices. This system was yet another source of abuses until 1802 when more stringent regulations about apprenticeship were laid down.² Men were no longer to have boys indentured to them personally but were only to instruct them. One third of the apprentice's wages was to go to his legal guardians, the rest was to go to the instructor, though apprentices were not to be paid more than a single day's pay no matter how much work their gang did. In 1804 it was decided that when a boy was halfway through his time half his wages were to go to his guardians.³

¹ J.M. Haas. 'The Introduction of Task Work into the Royal Dockyards 1775. The Journal of British Studies. VIII (1969) pp 44-67.

² Jefferies op at, (Papers printed 21st April 1806 p 12.14.)

³ " " " " " " " " " "

Not every craftsman was given a servant; they were used as a reward for good behaviour. Nearly all the Yard People on the otherhand, were entitled to the perquisite of chips, that is, the right to carry away gash wood. The waste of time and the expense involved in this roused considerable criticism. Good wood was cut up into the lengths permitted to be taken away. At any rate, it is clear that chips were of considerable value to the workmen, either as raw material, fuel, or for resale. However, the first move on this question came from the shipwrights, who approached the Navy Board for a cash allowance in lieu of the wood.¹ The Board took nearly 20 years to respond to this suggestion and then offered the shipwrights 6d a day, to be paid weekly, when the latter asked for 8d., other craftsmen being paid at lower rates.² The workers may have had a dual motive for wanting cash instead of the wood. High prices must have made a weekly money payment very attractive but also the men may have hoped to purchase the wood very cheaply, or to be given it. Two months after the abolition of chips the Resident Commissioner was complaining that no one would come forward to buy old wood and sawdust. He suspected that there was a combination involving the whole neighbourhood hoping that, as the Yard was being seriously inconvenienced by piles of waste, the Commissioner would have to give the wood away.³ Saxton avoided this by arranging to dispose of the timber by contract.⁴

An important addition to the Dock Yard employees' income was made in 1801 when, as a result of a great labour dispute, they were granted a war bonus. This was a remarkable scheme in as much as it was

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/ 20.10.1783
² N.M.M. POR/A/43 1.7.1801
³ N.M.M. POR/F/24 30.9.1801
⁴ N.M.M. POR/G/1 15.2.1802

related to the size of the workman's family. Single men and craftsmen with apprentices were not given anything and the other men were divided into three classes based on their occupation.¹

Two deductions were made from the income of the Yard workmen: 6d. a month was taken for both the surgeon and the chaplain until 1801 after which the doctor's services were given free. But these were minor losses compared with the disadvantages that arose from the men being paid one quarter in arrears. At an earlier date delays in payment had been as much as 9 months. Denied ready cash the Yard People had to obtain credit by discounting the notes given by the Navy Board stating the amount of the wages due. The creditors, called dealers,

"...were shop or Tavern keepers who supplied them with what they wanted, not in cash, but in different articles of provisions, liquors or goods at a deduction of from 10 to 15 per cent. from the amount of their earnings which the note they got from the Clerk of the Checks Office stated to be due to the Parties. Thus the workman was subjected to a deduction in the rate of his earnings of at least two shillings in the pound and which they were endeavouring to raise to three."²

Even greater hardships were involved because the workmen were sometimes forced to accept goods they did not want,"... shoes not fitting either the man or any of his family, and many more than required for their want..., (and) new bread besides the superabundance becoming mouldy and stale if kept.³ At one time the workers were also subject to the impositions of the Dock-Yard clerks who charged a fee for making out the notes which stated the mens wages.⁴

¹ see pp 255, 341

² Naval Chronicle XIV (1805) p.341.

³ M.S. Bentham op cit

⁴ R. Knight op. cit

Some junior Yard Officers acted as money lenders, a practice which could be used as a cover for fraud.¹ All of this virtually amounted to a truck system but it did not operate to the advantage of the Navy. In the first place the dealers had considerable power to create trouble in the Yard. In 1798, the Resident Commissioner reported that,

"The Dealers and Creditors of our People in this Yard appear to be urging them on to express their dissatisfaction at the unusual delay in payment of the Yard."²

The reform of the Job system (one of the piece rate schemes) created a similar incident in 1804. The new Job notes introduced in June were taking so long to add up that it had been impossible to issue the men's pay notes, which was "...very much to their disadvantage and distress-For their Dealers obstinately refuse supplying them with either Money or Necessaries without seeing the notes for the amount of wages due."³ "The other difficulty for the Navy was that delays in payment made it hard for them to recruit labour, especially the workmen with the new skills that the Yard was beginning to need to run its steam engines and modern machinery. The Dock Yard was restricted to selecting from men who could find credit."⁴

It must have been of considerable benefit to both the workers and the Navy when in October 1805 the Navy Board began to pay each man $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{7}{8}$ of his weekly wages, as subsistence money, the rest being paid at the end of the quarter.⁵ It is worth noting here that the chips allowance had been paid weekly. While the

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/28 10.11.1810

² N.M.M. POR/F/23 13.4.1798

³ N.M.M. POR/F/26 15.9.1804

⁴ see p. 375,

⁵ see p 285

regular wage was quarterly this must have been very welcome to the men. One group that did not like the reform were the traders who provided credit. The Naval Chronicle reported:

" It is lamentable, but not surprising, to observe the means which were resorted to by these Dealers to render the very salutary measure objectionable to the parties:- they threatened to cut off all temporary supplies in the interim, and had recourse to every power in their means to thwart the measure in its outset, but their efforts have been in vain, and this regulation has not only met with no obstruction, but promises to be the means of recalling numbers of those valuable Workmen, who have quitted the King's Service for that of the Merchant Builders, from whom they received their wages in a manner more suitable to the exigencies and wants of their Families." ¹

Nevertheless in 1813 it was reported that the workers were still selling their assignment notes. ² Shortly after this the Navy Board took the pay reform to its logical conclusion and all wages were paid weekly, saving the Navy, as the local newspaper noted, four days labour a year. ³ For some reason the Resident Commissioner thought that "... a very large majority of the artificers and workmen of this Yard are against the proposed system. ⁴ Even when weekly

¹ Naval Chronical, op cit.
² PRO ADM. 106/1886/18.8.1812
³ Hants. Tel 14.8.1813
⁴ N.M.M. POR/F/32 25.6.1813

payments had been operated for a while without trouble the Commissioner still felt further trials were needed before making the new arrangement permanent.¹

Another deduction from some of the Yard workers' wages was tax. This was clearly a source of grievance. In 1807 the Treasury was appealing to the Naval authorities for help in trying to prevent Yard employees evading the property tax. Next year the shipwrights and other artificers were petitioning for relief from the tax assessed on their incomes. The Treasury did not oblige and the complaint is very likely to have been related to the fact that, to overcome the workers evasions, the Dock Yard had begun to deduct the tax due at source.² Fortunately there is, in the Yard records, a statement of how much income was lost to the shipwrights because of direct taxes. The average daily earnings in two gangs were $6/10 \frac{2}{10}d$ for one company and $7/2 \frac{4}{10}d$. After tax the figures were $5/6 \frac{6}{10}d$ and $6/0 \frac{6}{10}d$, a loss of nearly $1/2d$ a day. These details are recorded because the men were complaining about the lowness of their earnings.³

Yard wage rates were particularly inflexible; for they could only be altered by an Order in Council. At the opening of the Revolutionary Wars, Dock Yard pay rates had been unchanged since Stuart times. We have seen how the Yard administration overcame this

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/32 14.12.1813

² N.M.M. POR/C/25 4.4.1807
N.M.M. POR/A/51 7.5.1808
N.M.M. POR/G/2 16.5.1808

³ N.M.M. POR/D/30 2.3.1814 P/A/45 8.4.1811 P/A/51 9.3.09

problem by using piecework and Extra. The resulting situation was very complex. The aim of this section is to state, as simply as possible, the rates of pay, to compare them with earnings, and to examine differentials. We will also trace fluctuations in earnings and give some consideration to standards of living.

The daily rates of pay for the main occupational groups in the Yard are set out in Table 2.5.¹ Taken alone these figures give an impression of a carefully graded system of differentials, though each step is only a little above the last. The various allowances that the Yard men were entitled to were also graded and are listed in Tables 2.6 to 2.9.² However, figures giving rates only, provide no guide to the actual daily earnings of the Yard Workers.

Table 2.10 summarizes the average daily earnings of various classes of Yard workers in 1811.³ (For simplicity's sake only Task work earnings are included, as not every group worked Job.) The first point to note is that there is a wider range of earnings than there were for rates, though the gradations are finer. There is no simple correlation between rates and earnings, Table 2.11 shows the different rates and earnings. This exercise shows that daily rates are obviously the grossest guide to differentials and clearly bear little relationship to actual earnings. For instance,

¹ PRO ADM 42/1306 to 1369
PRO ADM 42/1445 to 1469

² N.M.M. POR/A/44 17.9.1801 (Chips)
N.M.M. POR/A/50 1.7.1807 (Injuries)
N.M.M. POR/C/25 24.9.1805 (Subsistance)
 1.8.1805 (Subsistance)
 POR/G/1 15.4.1801 (War Bonus)

³ N.M.M. POR/D/29 7.11.1811
 POR/D/30 22.10.1813

a single rate of 2/1 a day for shipwrights disguises the wide variety of levels of pay they received. In fact, these were even greater than the figures presented here would suggest. The difference between the highest and lowest task earnings of shipwrights was nearly nine shillings.¹

Taking the table of daily earnings alone, we can see that the question of differentials is a complex one. While shipwrights earnings were generally high they were not all clearly distinguished from other craftsmen. The high level of the ropemakers' earnings is interesting; for as we have seen, they were really only semi-skilled workers doing very strenuous tasks. Even the ropemakers' labourers had earnings greater than some craftsmen. It would seem that the toilsome nature of a task was nearly as important a determinant of earnings as skill. This point also emerges when we look at the figures for quarterly wages.

Six occupational groups have been selected in order to examine, by systematic sample, earnings during the second quarter of each year over the period 1790 to 1817. These categories, shipwrights, smiths, joiners, ropemakers, (layers and spinners), riggers and labourers, give a fairly good cross section of the Yard workforce in terms of the skill and the arduousness of their tasks. (See Table 2.12 and Graph 2.2.)² The simplest general point to be made about these figures is that the effect of war and peace is

¹ ibid

² PRO ADM 42/ 1306 to 1369 and 1445 to 1469

clearly marked; this is even more apparent if we remember that 1790 saw a partial mobilization. Perhaps the most striking feature is the drop in earnings in 1802 due to the Peace of Amiens.

As far as differentials are concerned the data for quarterly earnings do not simplify the problem. There is a broad division apparent between the craftsmen and the semi- and unskilled, riggers and labourers, but among the craftsmen the situation is complicated. Initially it would be useful to divide our period into two, the years before and after the Peace of Amiens. Prior to the Peace the earnings of the craftsmen, including the ropemakers, tended to bunch together, though, strikingly, the smiths challenged the shipwrights. The smiths' apparent prosperity probably rested on a great deal of anchor work. The arduous nature of anchor work has already been described and the rate for such labour was higher than for ordinary work.¹ After 1803 the differentials between the shipwrights and the other groups became more marked, until about 1810 or 11 when their position is contested by the ropemakers and smiths. It does not seem possible to make any generalisations about wage differentials other than that there was a broad division between craftsmen and labourers and that the differentials fluctuated overtime.

To help measure changes in earnings the data have been recast into the form of an index, see Table 2.13, and these figures reveal how different was the experience of each occupational group in the Yard. For instance, the smiths can be contrasted with the joiners.

¹ See above p. 196

1.	Shipwrights	2/1
	Blockmakers	"
	Caulkers	"
2.	Joiners	2/-
	Smiths on anchor work	"
3.	Housecarpenters	1/10
	Wheelwrights	"
	Sailmakers	"
	Rope-Spinners, Hemp-Dressers, line and twine spinners	1/8
4.	Smiths	1/8
	Bricklayers	1/8
	Top sawyers	"
5.	Riggers	1/6
	Scavermen	"
	Storehouse labourers	"
6.	Hatchellors	1/5
7.	Pit sawyers	1/4
	Rope Winders	1/3
8.	Rope house labourers	1/3
9.	Riggers labourers	1/1
	Bricklayers labourers	"
	Labourers	"
10.	Quarter Boys	8d
11.	Oakum Boys	6d
12.	Wheel boy	4d

Table 2.5 The rates of day pay of the main groups of
Yard Artificers and Labourers in 1790.

Table 2.6 War Bonus 15 April 1801.

Shipwrights, Caulkers, Joiners, Wheelwrights, Blockmakers, Plumbers, Braziers, Locksmiths and Armourers with families.

1st. Those with four children and upwards -
one shilling per day

2nd. With children not exceeding three -
nine pence per day.

3rd. Without children sixpence per day.

House Carpenters, Sailmakers, Smiths, Sawyers, Bricklayers, and Ropemakers.

1st. Those with four children and upwards -
eleven pence per day.

2nd. With children not exceeding three -
eightpence per day.

3rd. Without children, fivepence per day.

Pitchheaters, Bricklayer's Labourers, Scavellmen, Riggers and their Labourers and Yard Labourers

1st. Those with four children and upwards -
Ten pence per day.

2nd. With children not exceeding three -
Sevenpence halfpenny per day.

3rd. Without children, four pence halfpenny per day.

But that no such allowance would be made to unmarried men or those who have servants allowed to them, and that the men thereupon appeared satisfied and promised to return to their duty immediately.

We acquaint you therewith and that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty have signified to us their approbation of our proceedings thereon, and have directed us by their order of the 1st. of this month to cause the Artificers and others employed in His Majesty's several

Dock &c.

Table 2.7 Chips Allowance

6d. a day	Shipwrights, single stationed men, Cabin keepers, blockmakers.
4d. a day	Blacksmiths, House Carpenters, Joiners, Wheelwrights, Masons.
3d. a day	Labourers, Bricklayers and their labourers, Riggers and their labourers, Pitchheater, Storehouse labourers.

Leadingmen were paid at the same rate as their men.

Table 2.8 Weekly Injuries allowance established 1807.

RATE

1st	Shipwrights and their apprentices, blockmakers, Joiners, House Carpenters, Wheelwrights, Cabin Keepers,
4/-	Plumbers, Bricklayers, Sailmakers, Locksmiths, Masons, Oarmakers, Repairers of Engines, Painters.
2nd	Riggers, Smiths, Sawyers, Spinners,
3/-	Ropelayers, Hempdressers, hatchellors, knotters.
3rd	Labourers, Scavemen, Pitchheater, Bricklayers labourers,
2/6	Riggers Labourers, Painters Labourers, Winders up, Wheelboys (men).
4th	
10d	Oakum Boy, Ropehouse labourers and boys.

Table 2.9 Weekly Subsistence Allowance - from 1806

<u>Per Week</u>	<u>Class</u>	
25/-	1st	Shipwrights, Single Stationed men, Caulkers, 1st Foremen, Smiths.
20/-	2nd	Cabin Keepers, Blockmakers, Coopers Masons, Locksmith, Plumbers, Founders, Tinmen, Smiths, Joiners, Ropemakers, Hempdressers, Sailmakers, Braziers, Engine Repairers, Carvers, Wheelwrights, Topmen, Sawyers.
17/6	3rd	Oarmakers, House Carpenters, Bricklayers, Sawyers, Hatchellors, Glaziers, Ropemakers Labourers.
15/-	4th	Painters, Storehouse labourers, Twine Spinners, Riggers, Scavelmen.
12/-	5th	Messengers, Warders labourers, Riggers labourers, Bricklayers labourers, Painters labourers, Pitchheaters, Knotters.
6/8	6th	Ropehouse boys.
4/-	7th	Oakum boys, boys manufacturing cordage.
2/6	8th	boys making beds, wheelboys.

Table 2.10 Average Weekly Earnings in 1811.

Shipwrights in the Capstan House	9/5½
Wheelwrights	8/-
Shipwrights in the Pumphouse	7/8½
Rope Spinners	7/-
Sailmakers	6/6½
Caulkers	6/2
Shipwrights in the Mast and Boat Houses and in Dockside companies	6/1¾
Hemp Dressers	6/-
Ropemakers labourers	5/6
Oarmakers	5/4½
Anchor Smiths	5/1½
Masons	5/0¼
Joiners	4/11
Line and Twine Spinners	4/10
Bricklayers	4/4½
Yard Labourers	3/6¼
Scavellmen	3/5¾
House Carpenters (Job work)	3/5½
Bricklayers Labourers	2/8¾
House Boys	1/3
Wheelboys	9¾d
Oakum Boys	9½d

Note, Earnings on Task work.

Table 2.11 The wage rates and earnings of selected groups of
Dock Yard workers ranked for comparison.

	<u>Rates</u>	<u>Earnings</u>
Shipwrights	} 1	1, 3, 7
Caulkers		6
Joiners	2	13
Smiths	2, 4	17, (11)
House Carpenters	} 3	18
Wheelwrights		2
Sailmakers		5
Ropemakers	} 4	4
Hempdressers		8
Line and Twine Spinners		14
Bricklayers		15
Scavermen	5	17
Ropemaker's labourers	8	9
Bricklayers labourers	} 9	19
Labourers		16

Rates - ranked according to
Table 2.11

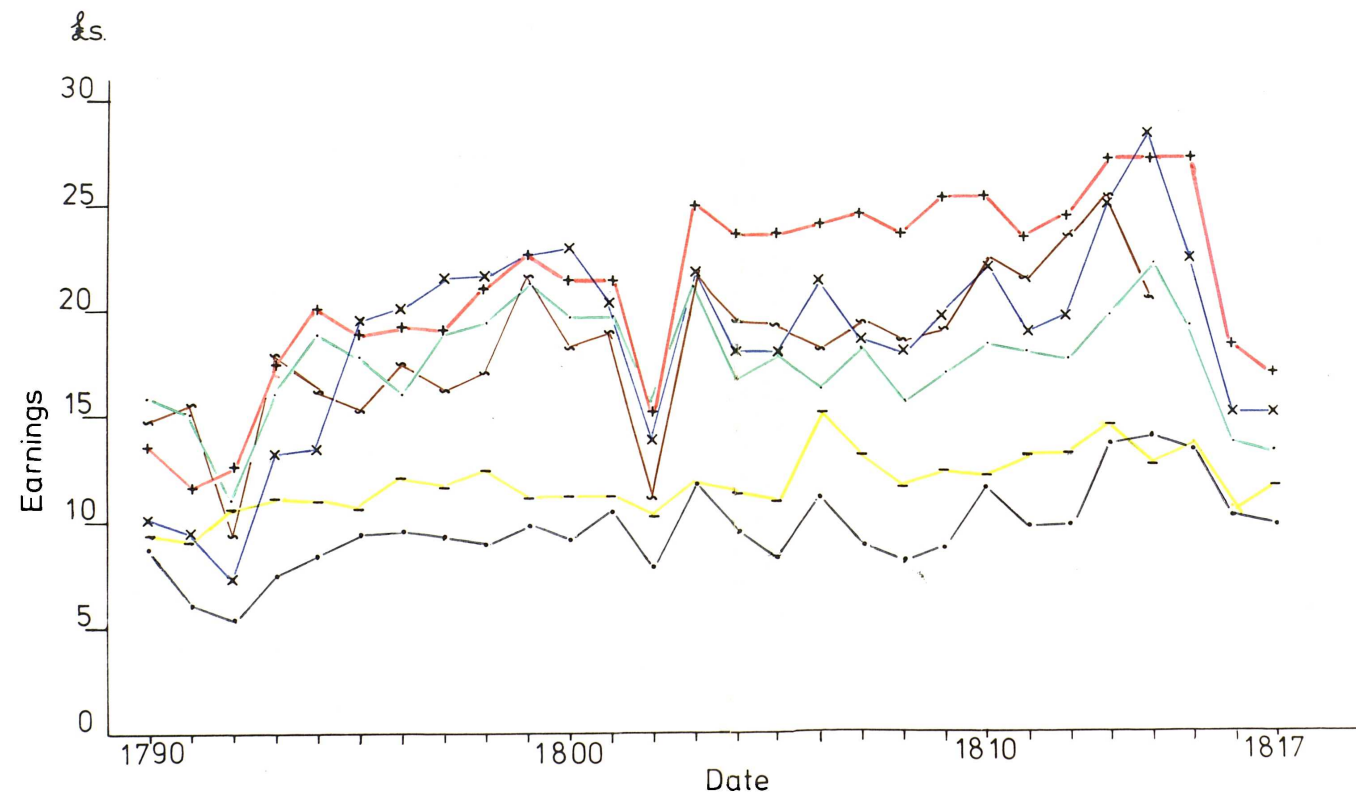
Earnings - ranked according
to Table 2.10

Table 2.12

The Average Earnings of a Sample of Workmen in various occupational groups.

		1790	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	
		<hr/>										
1.	Shipwrights	13.45	11.58	12.62	17.55	20.84	18.89	19.23	19.07	21.08	22.78	
2.	Smiths	10.04	9.53	7.15	13.31	13.48	19.50	20.11	21.57	21.71	22.80	
3.	Joiners	15.80	15.06	10.63	16.08	18.92	17.84	16.12	18.92	19.45	21.38	
4.	Ropemakers	14.73	15.55	9.1	18.01	16.24	15.43	17.66	16.37	17.19	21.69	
5.	Riggers	9.32	9.19	7.60	11.08	11.00	10.66	12.12	11.73	12.57	11.10	
6.	Labourers	8.66	5.95	5.34	7.40	8.28	9.40	9.47	9.12	8.87	9.72	
		<hr/>										
		1800	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
		<hr/>										
1.		22.45	24.56	15.07	25.23	23.87	23.89	24.30	24.80	23.82	25.61	25.88
2.		23.14	20.45	13.88	22.02	18.08	18.10	21.64	18.74	18.24	19.94	22.20
3.		19.77	19.90	15.27	21.20	16.86	18.29	17.52	18.64	15.89	17.24	18.60
4.		18.12	19.21	11.21	21.98	19.73	19.59	18.34	19.55	18.70	19.15	22.58
5.		11.12	11.14	10.25	11.99	11.46	11.07	15.30	13.21	11.63	12.50	12.30
6.		9.15	10.59	7.80	11.87	9.60	8.44	11.30	9.94	9.11	9.85	11.56
		<hr/>										
		1811	12	13	14	15	16	17				
		<hr/>										
1.		23.58	24.78	27.50	27.45	27.65	18.52	18.18				
2.		19.01	20.87	25.40	28.89	22.71	15.21	15.30				
3.		18.37	17.95	19.90	22.46	19.51	13.96	13.49				
4.		21.71	23.85	25.71								
5.		13.32	13.31	14.77	12.80	13.72	10.58	11.89				
6.		9.81	9.88	13.75	14.18	13.50	10.41	9.84				

Graph 2.2 Dock Yard Workers' Earnings



Key to Graphs 2.3 to 2.5







Silberling Price Index	
Shipwrights	
Smith	
Ropemakers	
Joiners	
Riggers	
Labourers	

Table 2.13 Wage Index Base 1790.

	1790	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	
Shipwrights	100	86.09	93.82	130.48	154.94	140.44	142.97	141.78	156.72	169.36	
Joiners	100	95.31	67.27	101.77	120.06	112.91	102.02	119.74	123.10	135.31	
Smiths	100	94.92	99.60	132.56	134.26	194.22	200.02	214.84	216.23	227.68	
Ropemaker	100	105.56	61.77	122.26	110.25	104.75	119.89	111.13	116.70	147.25	
Riggers	100	98.60	81.54	118.84	118.02	114.37	130.04	125.85	134.87	119.09	
Labourers	100	68.70	61.66	85.45	95.61	108.54	109.35	105.31	102.42	112.24	
	1800	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
Shipwrights	166.91	182.60	112.34	187.58	174.7	177.62	180.60	184.38	177.10	190.40	192.41
Joiners	125.12	125.94	96.64	134.17	106.70	115.75	110.88	116.83	100.56	109.11	117.72
Smiths	230.47	203.68	138.24	219.32	180.07	180.27	215.53	186.65	181.67	198.60	221.11
Ropemaker	123.01	130.41	76.10	149.92	133.94	132.99	124.50	132.72	126.95	130.00	153.29
Riggers	119.31	119.52	109.97	128.64	122.96	118.77	164.16	141.17	124.78	134.12	131.97
Labourers	105.81	122.28	90.06	137.06	110.85	97.45	130.48	114.78	115.47	133.48	113.27
	1811	12	13	14	15	16	17				
Shipwrights	175.31	184.23	204.46	204.08	205.7	137.69	135.16				
Joiners	116.26	113.60	125.94	142.15	123.48	88.35	85.37				
Smiths	189.34	207.86	252.98	287.74	226.19	151.49	152.39				
Ropemaker	147.38	161.77	174.54								
Riggers	142.91	142.81	158.47	137.33	147.21	113.51	127.75				
Labourers	113.27	114.08	158.77	163.74	155.88	120.20	113.62				

Table 2.14 Seasonal Fluctuations in Wages.

	1790				1800				1810			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Shipwrights	9.27	13.45	20.24	14.56	25.98	22.45	23.34	25.01	25.24	25.88	25.87	28.41
Labourers	6.78	8.66	8.12	6.96	10.84	9.15	11.04	10.29	10.63	11.56	12.13	10.89
Smiths	9.27	10.04	8.94	8.83	18.80	23.14	19.33	21.86	18.83	22.20	22.01	22.20
Joiners	13.73	15.80	18.23	14.24	23.33	19.77	20.45	19.44	18.46	18.60	19.99	17.36
Riggers	5.29	9.32	9.17	7.59	10.11	11.12	11.97	12.70	12.30	12.30	13.76	13.76
Ropemakers	9.34	14.73	16.28	10.30	18.50	18.12	18.78	18.60	18.91	22.58		

From the outbreak of the war the smiths enjoyed a very marked rise in earnings. On the other hand, the joiners' earnings remain much closer to the base line. The shipwrights experienced a general upward trend in earnings but with some fluctuation. However, this irregularity was not as strong as in the other trades shown on the graph. The ropemakers earnings rose in two steps, 1799 and 1810. Both these years saw technological innovation in rope making and the consequent revision of wage structures apparently to the financial benefit of the workmen.¹ In 1811 there was a general upward revision of piece rates for all trades² with an increase of 8½%. However, earnings, as shown here, are not an accurate guide to temporary changes in the level of Dock Yard activity. For instance, the increased work load of the Yard arising from the reception of the captured Danish Fleet in 1807-08 is not reflected in our figures. This feature may be due to the fact that we have only sampled the second quarter of each year. The extent of seasonal fluctuations in earnings can be shown by reference to Table 2.14 and Graph 2.5 which show the pattern of wages for selected years.

The information presented here allows for few generalizations. There is no recurrent seasonal high or low apparent, but there are clearly fluctuations in earnings between quarters. These fluctuations seem more marked among the craftsmen and there is some slight tendency for the differences to become less during the war years. Clearly while the length of daylight and weather must have had

¹ See above p 202 and below p.323

² N.M.M. POR/A/54 16.3.1811

some effect on the earnings of Yard workers natural work rhythms were sometimes over-borne by the Navy's demands for material and services. Possible, uneven earnings were matched by irregularity in the intensity of labour. High winter earnings coincided with much arduous work in short hours, low summer earnings corresponded to relative under-employment. As we will see, civilian shipbuilding on the Thames was likewise characterised by irregular work patterns and possibly by chronic under-employment.

What evidence does the index offer about standards of living? Clearly, wage data provide only half the information we require if we are to investigate living standards. Ideally what we require is an index of prices based on the goods and services used by the Yard workers and weighted so as to reflect the pattern of their consumption of those items. As always the ideal is unobtainable. The only price data available for Portsmouth is the market price of bread, taken from various newspapers, and the contract price of bread and various other commodities given in the Poor Law records.¹ For several reasons this information is totally inadequate. First, the difficulties of using long term contract prices as a guide to short term price fluctuations are well known; and even though we might be concerned to trace the movement of prices over a fairly long period, say twenty five years, there is evidence to suggest the prices paid by local Poor houses in Portsmouth are not a reliable

¹ Portsmouth Gazette
Portsmouth/Hampshire Telegraph
Portsmouth Chronicle
Portsmouth Courier
P.C.R.O. PL 12/1-12

guide to market prices.¹ Secondly, we have no idea of what the Yard workers spent their money on. We can probably safely presume that food consumed a major part of their earnings, but what sort of food? Though there is a fairly good run of bread prices given in local publications we must be aware that from 1796 many Yard workers were obtaining bread from a co-operative mill and bakery at below market prices.² Thus when the Yardmen organised a consumers' strike in protest over high prices one of the items they did not boycott was bread. Moreover, there is the possibility that there existed a black market in stolen or smuggled foodstuffs.³ Nor does man live by bread alone. The Yard workers also protested about high rates of interest.⁴ This was a matter of concern for two reasons. In the first place, the Yard men suffered, until 1805, from having to obtain credit to enable them to survive until their quarterly wages arrears were paid.⁵ In the second place, some at least of the Yard men were concerned in raising money⁶ to purchase land and build houses. For all these reasons we do not believe that it is possible to construct a meaningful price index for use in this study. At best we can obtain only a general idea of how well the Yard worker fared during the French Wars by comparing the level of their earnings with a general index of prices.

¹ See above p. 87

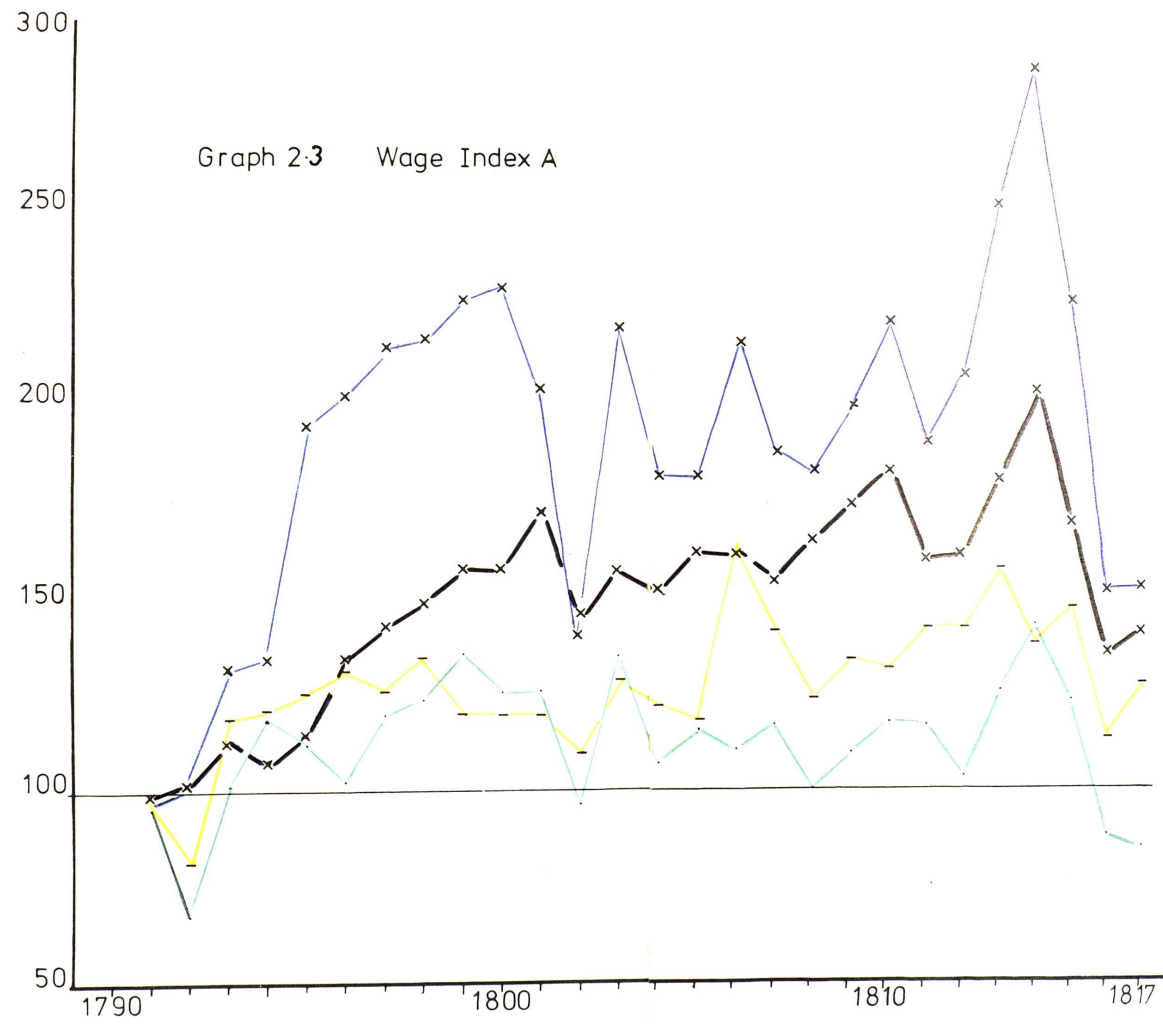
² See below p. 339

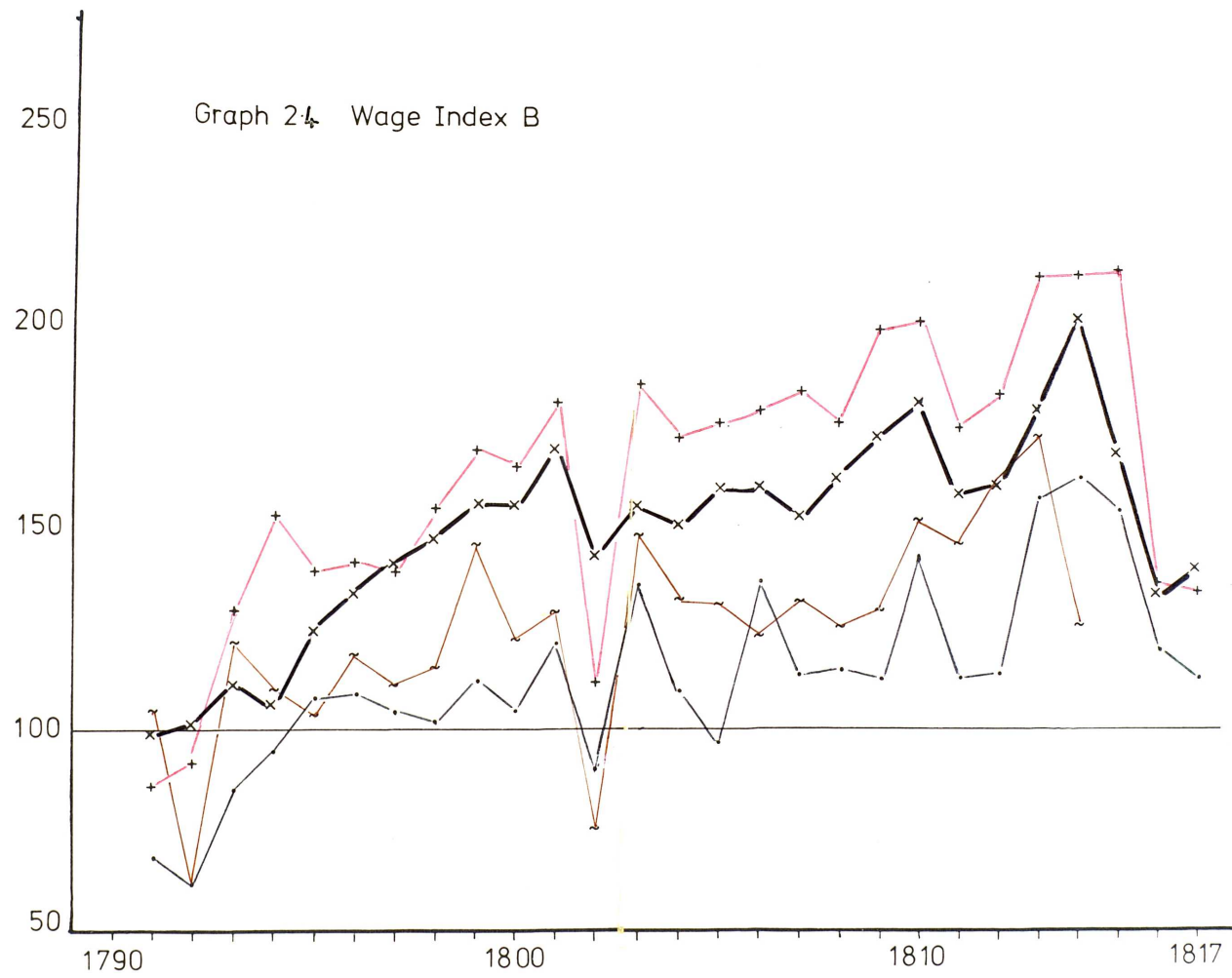
³ See below p. 509

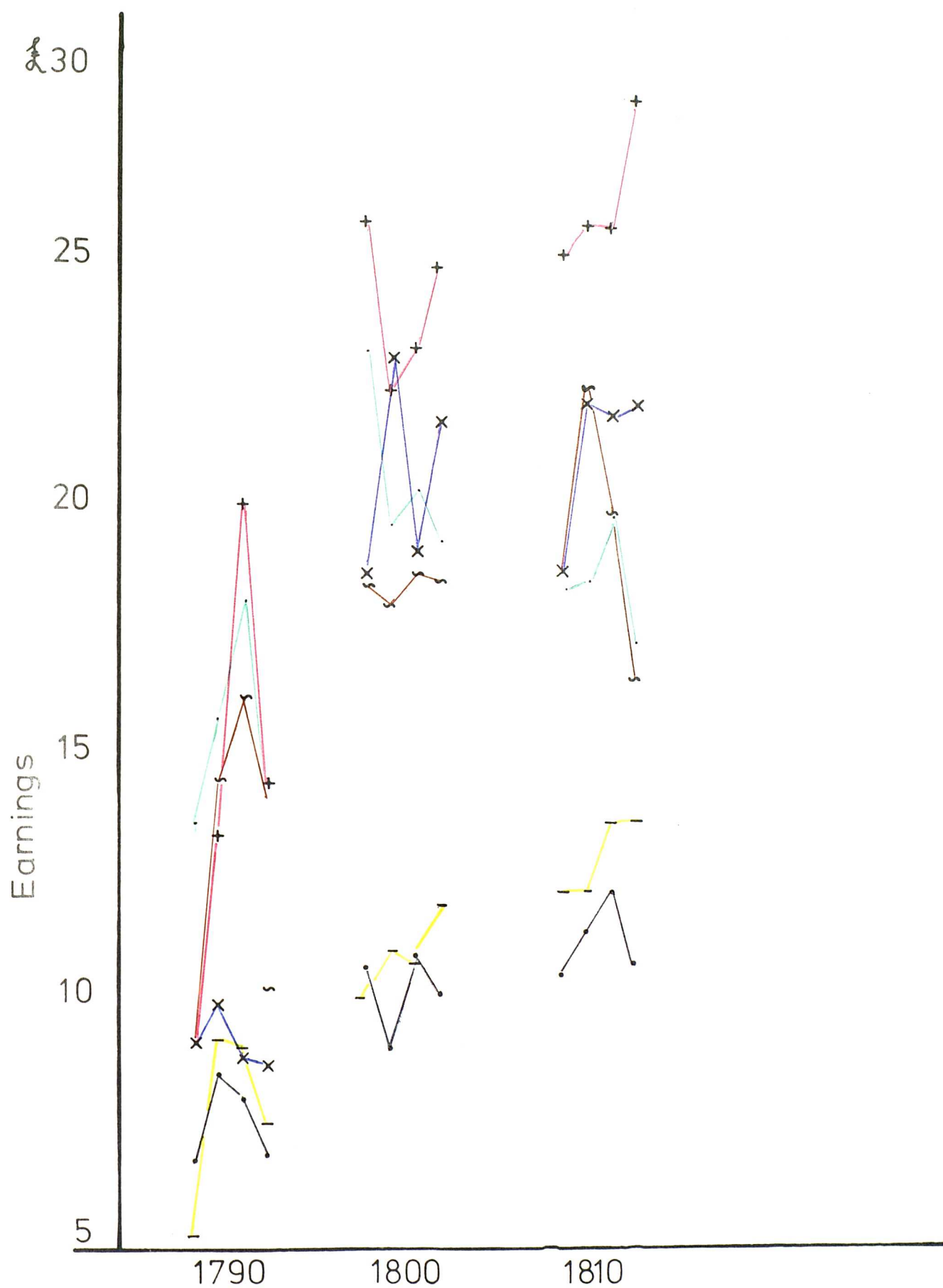
⁴ See below p. 342

⁵ See above p. 247

⁶ See above p. 28







Graph 2.5 Seasonal Fluctuations
in Earnings

The choice of indices is wide and perplexing. In fact we have selected one of the oldest, Silberling's. The advantage of using Silberling's is that we can select an index figure for the second quarter of each year and that it can be directly related to our wage index because both use 1790 as a base. Though Silberling has been strongly criticised a recent authority has stated that for price movements from 1788/92 onward

"... the condemnation of Silberling on technical grounds (combined with a preference for the technically superior G.R.S. or Rosseaux index) may show sound academic discrimination but scarcely affects the result".¹

Graphs 2.3 and 2.4 show the wage indices and Silberling's index. Once more we need to say that the data is not easy to describe. Only two groups, the shipwrights and the smiths appear to have been able to maintain the level of their earnings above the increases in prices. Other trades would appear to have done less well. In general the riggers labourers and ropemakers did better after 1803 than they did in the previous decade, though the ropemakers did not enjoy a marked improvement of their position until 1808. The joiners serve as a warning about making glib generalizations about the economic experience of the Yard workers. These indices would suggest that some Yard craftsmen were under increasing financial pressure during the war. However, these figures are subject to a very important qualification. From 1805, wage data should probably be altered to allow for the improvement in purchasing

¹ M.W. Flinn 'Trends in Real Wages 1750 - 1850' The Economic History Review XXVII (1974) pp. 395-413.

power that accrued to the workmen when weekly subsistence payments were introduced. It was estimated that this saved the workmen 10 to 15% of their earnings.¹ However, there is no way of checking this figure and we have seen how some workers may have continued to obtain credit until 1813 when all wages were paid weekly.² Nonetheless, these pay reforms probably made a significant difference to the Yard workmen which is not revealed by our figures.

One further point requires comment. Comparing the wage indices with Silberling's price index, it is possible to distinguish a rough correlation in their movements. This parallel fluctuation is most marked in the case of the shipwrights, smiths and labourers. Of course there is the possibility that the wage and price indices move together because they are related to some common factor, in particular the state of the war; but it is also possible that this situation reflected a degree of workers' control over their productivity and thus their earnings. Alternatively the Yard authorities may have been responsive to price level changes when determining what work was to be done and at what rate.

With the important qualification about the opening and termination of the war the data we have gathered do not provide evidence that the standard of living of the Yard workmen experienced any dramatic change during the period 1793 to 1815. If we allow for administrative reforms, the product of petty pilfering and

¹ Naval Chronicle. 14 (1806) p. 341.

² See above p. 247

steps taken by the Yard workers themselves to protect their conditions, it is probable that in general the economic circumstances of Yard workmen, and in particular of the largest group of craftsmen, improved over the period as a whole. Yet we must also bear in mind what the Yardmen had to do to earn their money. If the smiths had regularly to work an eighteen hour day, leaving them physically wrecked, then it seems difficult to argue that their standard of life rose with their earnings. We must, when debating the standard of living issue, be careful not to become hypnotised by the oscillation of price and wage indices.

We have nearly completed our study of the Dock Yard artificers and labourers in their role as industrial employees. All that remains is to consider the way they were controlled when at work. However, before doing this it is best if we try to place the Dock Yard in an industrial context by examining briefly civilian shipbuilding on the Thames.

Civilian Shipbuilding on the Thames

Employment

London was Britain's leading shipbuilding centre, but it is impossible to be exact about the number of shipwrights employed there. In 1795 just over six hundred shipwrights signed a petition sent to the Admiralty from the men in the Thames merchant yards.¹ An estimate for 1802 put the total number of shipwrights on the river at 2,500, while an official return of 1805 listed 1,007 shipwrights and apprentices as being employed in 36 private yards.² Estimates for 1814 vary from 3,000 to 4,500, but not all these men were employed in Yards.³ There were said to be a considerable number of shipwrights working on the river shores, on the Surrey canal, or doing repairs afloat.⁴

Though pre-eminent in shipbuilding, the Capital's position was being undermined by competition at home and abroad and its lead in the tonnage tables was due to its unique ability to build vessels large enough to serve as third rate ships of war and East Indiamen.⁵ London also enjoyed a reputation for workmanship and quality that gave its ships alone the highest of insurance ratings.⁶ The repair of merchantmen was important enough to support a number of specialist yards.

¹ P.R.O. ADM/i/5125 1795

² PP 1813-14 (115) VIII. 1. op.cit. p.2.
Papers presented to the House of Commons op.cit.

³ PP 1813-14 (115) VIII. 1. op.cit.
Quarterly Review XI (1814) 244
W. Harrison The Substance of a Speech before the Select Committee
Of The House of Commons on East India built Shipping (1814).

⁴ PP 1813-14 (115) VIII. 1. op.cit. p.371.

⁵ R. Davis The Rise of the English Shipping Industry (1962) p.70.

⁶ P.P. 1813-14 (115) VIII. 1. op.cit. p.50. It was said of the ships built at the out ports on speculation, "... they are like Jews razors, they are built for sail and not for use ..."

The very nature of London's ship construction industry meant that the pattern of employment was irregular. The numbers of men needed to build large vessels varied greatly and depended in part upon the delivery date. One witness told a Parliamentary enquiry that the workforce needed to build an East Indiaman of 1200 tons in 12 months would fluctuate between 60 and 130 artisans and labourers.¹ Another witness said that, given 18 months, 24 to 30 shipwrights would be needed.² Little or no work was provided for long periods during the construction of a war ship because it had to be left to season, thus occupying a building slip without providing profit or employment.³ A valuable source of work was removed in 1808 when the East India Company ceased buying ships built on speculation.⁴

Repair work was mainly a winter occupation, the busiest months being September to January and, if no repair work was available, March and April were the slackest.⁵ The repair trade fell off after the departure of the East and West India fleets. During the sailing season work was fitful and, when available, might mean intense labour and double shifts to get a vessel turned round quickly, or the repair completed within the tide. Even major repairs provided no regularity of employment. A clerk in the firm of Mester told Parliament:

"It very often happens that we have to employ fifty or sixty, seventy or eighty men for a fortnight or three weeks, and then the hurry is over."⁶

The men,

"... work for as many days as they can and walk about the remainder looking for more; a man is not tied to a Yard."⁷

¹ ibid pp 18, 63.

² ibid p.11.

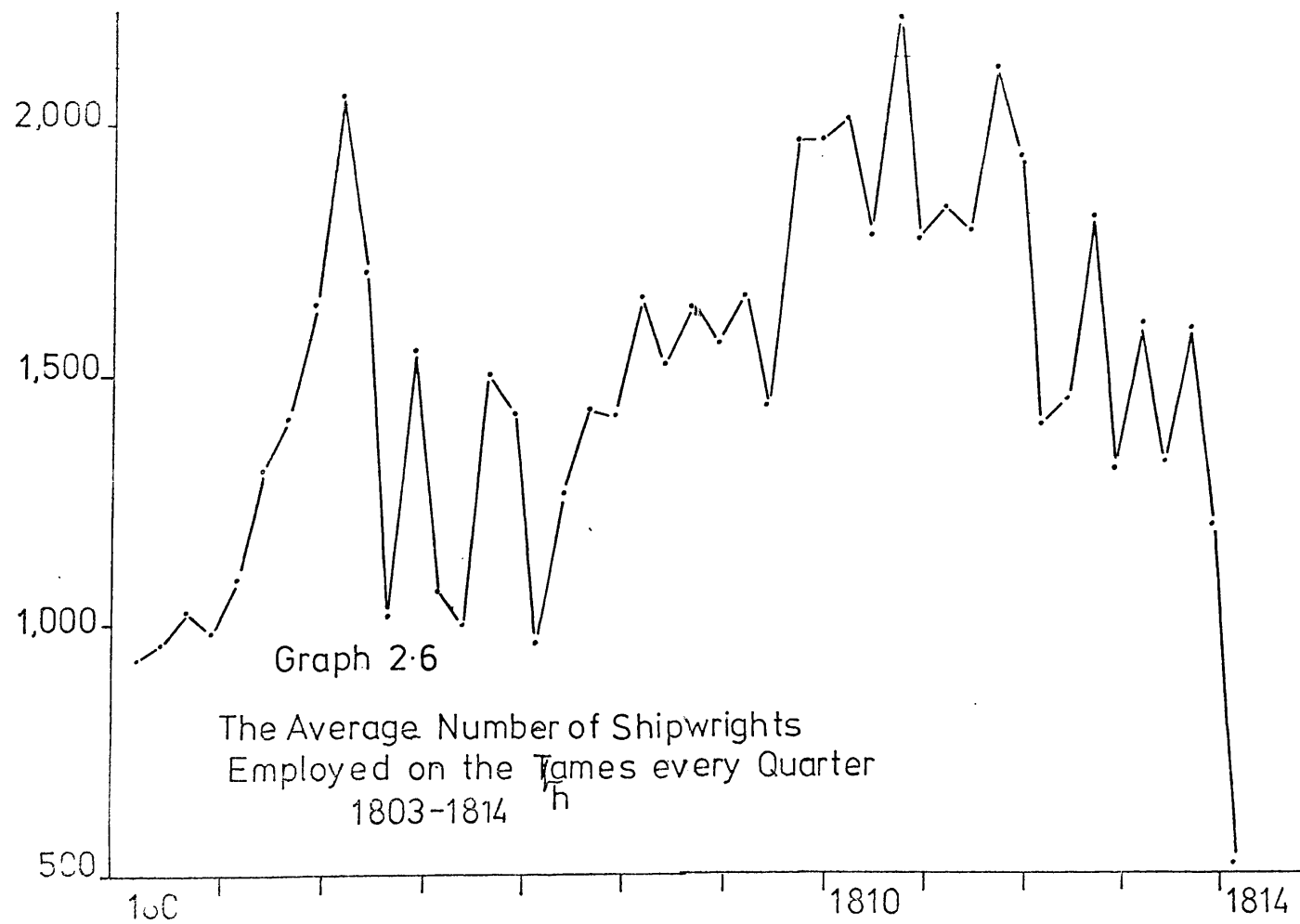
³ W. Harrison Reports and Papers on the Impolicy of Employing India Built Ships in the Trade of the East India Company (1809).

⁴ ibid

⁵ P.P. 1813-1814 (115) VIII 1. op.cit. p.424.

⁶ ibid p.374

⁷ ibid p.373



However, another witness said that the masters had each a group of "regular" men who, though not permanently employed, had preference for work and overtime.¹ Even so, employment could be for as little as a quarter of a day. Besides the workmen who moved from one Yard to another, and who were considered to be poor workmen, there were a number of independent shipwrights who did not work for any master.²

The irregularity of the shipwrights' employment can be demonstrated very clearly by graphing data for the numbers of men employed in the merchant yards between 1803 and 1814.³ (See Graph 2.6) The fluctuations shown are enormous, more than 100% in 1805, and there is a well marked seasonal pattern. The quarters of highest and lowest employment over the period are distributed as follows.

Table 2.15

Quarter	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
No. of cases of Highest Employment	3	0	7	3
No. of cases of Lowest Employment	3	5	1	3

The slack period of spring and early summer is clear. The busiest quarter, the third, would coincide with the arrival of the homeward bound merchantmen. In all, one witness claimed a shipwright could only expect steady employment for 20 weeks a year.⁴ Caulkers were said to enjoy even less work.⁵

Besides irregularity of employment there appears to have been considerable under-employment. This is difficult to quantify. The figures

¹ ibid pp 422, 424.

² ibid pp 422, 371.

³ ibid pp 399-418.

⁴ W. Harrison Remarks on the Culumines published in the Quarterly Review on the English Shipbuilders. (1814)

⁵ P.P. 1813-14 (115) VIII 1. op.cit. p.39.

for employment do not include shipwrights not working in a yard. But if we take the maximum and minimum estimates of the number of shipwrights on the Thames during the 1800's (2,500 and 4,500) and the maximum numbers employed in the yards (just over 2,200) then we can calculate a rough range of figures for a minimum rate of unemployment. These figures work out at approximately 12% and 51%. They are not a true measure of unemployment because we know that there was some work outside the Yards but there does seem to have been a constant reserve of labour for the masters to call upon. A Parliamentary Committee asked an officer of one of the largest yards on the river:

"There are always a sufficient quantity of unemployed to meet any great pressure that may arise?"

The officer replied:

"We have always found men to do any work we have had to do."¹

Only a yard a long way down river and with tight work discipline had occasional trouble recruiting labour.²

Wages

It probably goes without saying that only scattered references exist as to the level of wages among London shipbuilding workers and that a cursory examination has revealed none for earnings. For simplicity's sake what data we have is presented in a table.³ There is of course the same complication as in the Naval Dock Yards; piece rates are disguised by terms which express the wage rate in time.

¹ ibid. p.369

² ibid. p.424 The Yard was Pitcher's at Northfleet.

³ John Gast op.cit.
P.P. 1813-14 (115) VIII. 1. op.cit. pp 6, 22, 340, 421.

Table 2.16 The wage rates and earnings of shipwrights employed on the Thames.

1793 to 1801	wage rate	3/6 A Day
	earnings	5/3 to 7/- for a Day and a Half and Double Days
1801	wage rate	4/- A Day
	earnings	4/4 $\frac{1}{4}$ A Day and a Quarter
1813	wage rate	probably unchanged
	earnings	5/- to 7/- 13 hours
		8/- to 9/- 14 to 15 hours during summer.

As already demonstrated the wage structure in shipbuilding is very confusing. We must remember that the above figures were supposed to be based upon a piece work system with known prices. However, to cut through the confusion, we can suggest that what mattered to the shipwright was not so much the basic rate as the amount of work the master was prepared to pay for: that is whether the master was willing to give a Day's work or a Day and a half. This would seem to make sense in a situation of scarce and fluctuating work.

The differential between the rates paid in London and those given in merchant yards else-where is difficult to establish but the differential was mentioned by contemporaries as attracting men to work on the Thames and was estimated as being 1/6.¹ This figure corresponds roughly with the difference between the Thames rate and the Dock Yard rate of 2/1d; yet this cannot be seen as reflecting the difference in income and total earnings between shipwrights in civilian and government employ.

¹ ibid. p.39.

Though the London shipwrights may have been better paid than their country cousins they do not appear to have been particularly better paid than other London craftsmen. For example London carpenters and joiners working in the building industry were paid from 5/- to nearly 7/- a day during this period and they would have been subjected to employment conditions somewhat similar to those of the shipwrights.¹ Millwrights, whose position was rather different, demanded a day rate of between 5/3d and 6/3d.² By occasionally working very long hours, the shipwrights may have been able to push the earnings for a day to quite a high figure, but, as we have seen, they had little chance of maintaining those earnings.

In all, the London shipwright was in rather a precarious economic position, and it was one from which he had little hope of escaping. A great gulf separated the Thames shipwright from the master builder. The following estimate of the requirements of a Thames-side builder demonstrates the size of capital involved in the ship-construction industry.³

Table 2.17 The Estimated cost of a Thames Ship Yard in 1813.

Dry Dock	£15,000
Slip	£3,000
Mould loft; Saw-pits etc.	£10 - 20,000

Admittedly few shipyards were on the scale of those in London. Shipwrights in the out-ports could manage to form co-operatives to build small vessels which needed little in the way of capital equipment to construct; timber could be obtained on credit; and interim payments might

¹ A.L. Bowley Wages in the United Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge 1900) p.82.

² See below p.368

³ W. Harrison Remarks ... op.cit.

be made as a vessel progressed.¹ Even so, conditions in London were rather different, and the construction of merchantmen was shifting away from the Capital. At best shipwrights there could probably only hope to obtain repair work if they would not, or could not, find employment in a yard. It is this picture of a declining highly capitalised industry with a chronically poor employment situation, that at times became acute, which must be borne in mind when we come to consider shipwrights as trade unionists.

T. Neil Shipbuilding in Sunderland. Antiquaries of Sunderland XXV (1972) pp 61-75.

D. Chapman 'The New Shipwrights Building Company of Dundee' 1826 to 1831. Economic History Review X (1940) pp 148-151.

Victoria History of the County of Durham ed. W. Page II (1909) p.303.

Even so, some of the perils of private enterprise could be severe and it was not easy for a workingman to amass capital in the shipbuilding line. See J. Leather 'The Shipbuilding Bayle' M.M. 51 (1965) pp 131-145.

Civilian Apprenticeship

The most common form of apprenticeship among the Thames shipwrights was the indenturing of a large number of boys to a master builder. Indeed outdoor apprenticeship of this form may have been common in shipbuilding as a whole representing part of the general decline of the apprenticeship system.

In 1805 the merchant shipbuilding yards made a return of the numbers of shipwrights, caulkers and apprentices of both trades employed by them. The percentage of apprentices to trained men was 70% in the case of shipwrights and 40% in that of caulkers. Several points must be made with regard to these figures. In the first place, the difference between the shipwrights and the caulkers may be misleading. Many shipwrights were two handed, that is they could caulk, so that only a few lads may have been apprenticed as caulkers. This reinforced by the fact that there is some evidence of there being more illegal caulkers than unindentured shipwrights, making apprenticeship less important in caulking than in the shipwright's line.¹ Secondly these figures do not represent the proportion of apprentices to the total number of shipwrights, covering only men employed in the yards. As employment in a shipyard was irregular these figures might imply that the bulk of permanently employed labour in a merchant yard consisted of apprentices. In fact there is good reason for thinking that this was so. Few individual shipwrights would be able to fully train an apprentice. The very technology of building a ship

¹ T.K. Derry 'The Repeal of the Apprenticeship Clauses of the Statute of Artificers'. Economic History Review III (1931-1932) pp 67-86. The best account of apprenticeship in the eighteenth century is in D. George London in the Eighteenth Century (1925). Using D. George's work a more acute distinction of the various forms of apprenticeship might be developed.

prohibited this, as did the irregularity of employment. Moreover, during slack periods an apprentice would be an unwelcome encumbrance to an artisan.

Evidence that masters did employ large groups of boys is fairly scattered; mainly, we feel, because it was so common-place as not to call for comment. One estimate of the requirements of a Thames-side builder states that, besides fluctuating numbers of shipwrights, 50 apprentices were needed.¹ John Gast, the shipwright unionist, noted that in order to force the Thames shipwrights to end a labour dispute, the master builders sought to carry on working with apprentices and illegal men.² Clearly the apprentices were controlled by the masters and not the men. In Liverpool it was said that all building had been done in the early nineteenth century by apprentices, the shipwrights doing only repair work.³ There is further evidence which suggests that the apprentice system was also abused in Newcastle and that in general the northern builders were shortening the length of periods of indenture.⁴

In addition to the large scale use of outdoor apprentices, masters hired men who had served no apprenticeship at all. Evidence on this point is mixed. In 1814 the Quarterly Review claimed:

"The modern builder, it seems, prefers taking men who can handle an axe and adze, or an augre, whether millwright, wheelwright, house carpenter or joiner, on the pressure of the moment, to bringing up regular apprentices to the trade."⁵

The masters denied this, but a shipwright giving evidence before the Select Committee on Apprenticeship said that the use of illegal men often

¹ P.C.R.O. Papers relating to Ships of War and Timber etc. op.cit.

² J. Gast op.cit.

³ National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Report of the Committee on Trade Societies (1860) pp 479-520.

⁴ The Records of the Company of Shipwrights of Newcastle upon Tyne 1622-1967 ed. D.J. Rowe (Surtees Soc. 181 1970) p.9.

⁵ Quarterly Review X (1813) p.477.

put regular shipwrights out of work.¹ Further, it is clear that the shipwrights were anxious to keep unapprenticed men off the river. In 1802 Gast said, that it was

"... the custom of the trade not to permit any stranger to work before showing his indenture of apprenticeship and otherwise establishing his right to the trade."²

What happened to an illegal man is not clear. One statement from the Masters' point of view claimed that no one would work with an unindentured man.³ A spokesman for the shipwrights alleged that illegal men were merely reported to a magistrate.⁴ Such temperate action hardly accords with the shipwrights' history as unionists, and illegal men were certainly dealt with more vigorously elsewhere.⁵ In any case, it was probably fairly easy for an unindentured man to find work on the river outside a yard and away from society members. In the case of the caulkers there were said to be two yards that employed nothing but untrained men.⁶

Whatever the situation was with regard to illegal men, it is clear that civilian shipwrights were in no stronger position with regard to apprenticeship than were the King's shipwrights. On balance, the civilians were less fortunate, in not having employers who enforced apprenticeship qualifications as a condition of employment. Nor did the Thames shipwrights receive financial benefits from the masters' control of the apprentices.

¹ P.P. 1812-13 VI (243) 941. Select Committee to whom the petitions of several Masters, Journeymen, Mechanics and Handicraft ... respecting the Apprentice Law was referred.

² J. Gast op.cit.

³ P.P. 1813-14 (115) VIII 1 op.cit. p.6.

⁴ P.P. 1812-13 IV (243) 941 op.cit.

⁵ Nat. Assoc. Promotion of Soc. Sci. op.cit.

⁶ P.P. 1812-13 IV (243) 941 op.cit.

Considering the nature of employment of the Thames as we have described it, it is possible to suggest that, like other trades in the capital, the London shipwrights may have been divided into honourable and dishonourable parts. The honourable men being those shipwrights given preference for work in the yards and fully indentured. The dishonourable were, perhaps, those shipwrights "... who do not like to be stationary" and those who worked afloat and on the river shore. One might reasonably suppose that it would be amongst the latter that unindentured men would find it easiest to enter. However we must not over-estimate the aristocratic nature of the honourable part of the trade. Irregular and low employment, mass outdoor apprenticeship and the constant risk of injury and sickness terminating a man's working life, or reducing his earning capacity, must have posed a constant threat to the London shipwright.

That threat was met by strong organization which ironically helped keep wages on the Thames high and so attracted more men to the trade. What advantage then, was there in civilian employment as opposed to working for the Government? Work in a Dock Yard was at least regular, but it had other drawbacks. One witness before a Parliamentary enquiry suggested that shipwrights preferred civilian jobs for reasons of "... pleasure; some do not like the confinement in the King's Yard ..."¹.

Was labour rigidly disciplined in the *Dock Yards*? Though we now turn to this question, the absence of evidence on labour discipline in civilian shipbuilding compels us to rely on general works, in order to place the Yards in a comparative framework.

¹ P.P. 1813-1814 (115) VIII op.cit. p.22.

Table 2.18

Shipwrights' manhours lost to the Yard as a percentage of total manhours worked by shipwrights.

<u>Sickness</u>	<u>Leave</u>	<u>Without Leave</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Date</u>
5.3	0.2	1.4	6.9	1791
5.6	0.1	0.9	5.6	2
1.1	0.9	0.9	2.9	3
1.4	0.1	0.8	2.3	4
2.2	0.8	1.1	4.1	5
1.6	0.7	1.2	3.5	6
1.6	0.1	1.6	3.3	7
1.6	0.9	1.6	4.1	8
1.2	0.2	1.5	2.9	9
2.0	0.1	1.3	3.4	1800
1.0	0.1	1.5	2.6	01
1.2	0.3	1.9	3.4	10
1.0	0.2	0.7	1.9	20

Work Discipline

The discipline of the Dock Yards has recently been described as a "compound of civil service and armed services practices" tending to make it of a different nature to the discipline existing in civilian concerns.¹ We will examine Professor Pollard's description of Yard discipline and what the result of this exercise implies about the commitment of the Yard labour force to an industrial work ethic.

If, by comparing the Dock Yards to the armed services it is meant to imply that the former practised a strict system of subordination by means of corporal punishment, then the Yards had little relation to either the army or the navy. The Navy Board expressed its greatest disapproval of an incident in which a junior Yard officer struck a workman, and the Yard workmen were involved in at least one demonstration against the flogging of a serviceman.² On the other hand Naval administration was tending towards bureaucracy. It has been said that: "Perhaps no department more closely resembled the civil service than did the Admiralty."³ For instance, fees and perquisites associated with particular offices and official actions were abolished, though they may have taken a little time to die. A competitive element for entering the Yard service was introduced when a class of superior shipwright apprentices was established.⁴ Tenure in a post and promotion were to a growing extent dependent on an individual's ability to fulfil the tasks required of him. In addition, the number and scope of written regulations were increased. These reforms were the result of a number of Parliamentary enquiries: that into Fees

¹ S. Pollard The Genesis of Modern Management (1965)

² See below p.

³ F.W. Wickwire 'Admiralty Secretaries and the British Civil Service' Huntingdon Quarterly XXVIII (1965) pp 235-254.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/F/30 29.10.1810
N.M.M. POR/D/28 9.11.1810

and Perquisites of 1782, the Commission of Enquiry set up by St. Vincent in 1802, and the Commission of Revision established by the Tories in 1805. Further there were a number of House of Commons Select Committees on Finance.¹ The influence of Samuel Bentham also made for greater bureaucracy. Bentham's insistence on rationality and efficiency made him an arch, if brilliant, bureaucrat. For instance, he insisted that all his instructions came from the Admiralty's secretary in writing. One of his favourite principles was that of "individual responsibility".²

Granted that naval administration was becoming more bureaucratic, it has still to be determined that this had an effect on the nature of industrial discipline in the Dock Yard and whether or not similar trends were discernible in civilian industrial plants.

The control of an industrial labour force can be seen as being related to a number of different, but connected, areas of activity. Time management is the aspect of work control that has attracted most attention from historians and has received the most dramatic presentation. "The clock" wrote Lewis Mumford "not the steam engine is the key machine of the modern industrial age."³

Time discipline in the Dock Yards had been long established. The ringing of a bell to mark the hours of work was a familiar sound in all the Dock Yard towns. The workmen were also mustered, answering a roll call, when they came into work. Those who were late lost half a day's work, though a Navy Board warrant and other evidence suggest that this was not

¹ See above p.
P.P. 1818 (97) III 143. Select Committee on Finance. Eighth Report.
P.P. 1819 (257) II 159. Select Committee on Finance. Third Report.

² M.S. Bentham op.cit.

³ Lewis Mumford Techniques and Civilization (1937) p.14
E.P. Thompson 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism'
Past and Present 38 (1967) pp 56-97.

strictly enforced.¹ The warrant ordered that the muster was no longer to be recorded in a rough book, which it had been customary to destroy after a fair copy had been made. Further, nobody was to be "chequed" for appearing at the first call if they only came to the second, except men working afloat and even then an officer was to ascertain that the men concerned were at their posts. One critic of the Dock Yard believed that the clerks at the gates who took the muster could be bribed, marking men present with a line, and those absent with a row of dots that could be joined up into a line later in return for a consideration.² However, by 1812 regulations were being more closely followed. One worker complained in his diary:

"I was a little late for my call at 1 O'clock Mr. Nicholson the Call Clark Did put me out. After some time talking he says nobody is to be mustered losing their Call morning or Afternoon he did not Cheque me."³(SIC)

In general, this man's diary shows some concern with time keeping and the loss of wages due to missed musters. He notes that "Catch Calls" occurred, i.e. musters made at irregular times to check that all the workmen were present in the Yard and had not slipped out. However, no reference has been found in this study to "basseying", that is leaving the Yard unofficially by means of a rope over the Yard wall, noted by D. Baugh for an earlier period.⁴

The Yard Officers made efforts to prevent the workmen wasting their time while at work. The Yard taphouse always presented a temptation to loiter and it was carefully regulated; no "meals or messes" were allowed to be "performed and Eaten therein during the working house of the Yard." However, the Commissioner could still complain that "the Tap is much

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/44 28.3.1802

² Brenton op.cit. p.179

³ P.C.R.O. 4A op.cit.

⁴ D. Baugh op.cit.

frequented at breakfast Time".¹

With such a large area and wide variety of jobs, including some carried out afloat at Spithead, the close regulation of time and effort on the part of the workmen was difficult. A great deal of responsibility for controlling the workmen must have lain with the junior officers, Quartermen and leadingmen. Also, unlike a textile plant or other mechanised factories, most of the Yard's work was not tied to the regular pace of a machine, so that exact time keeping and constant attendance and attention to the job were not so important. In the Yard, work rates depended on many things, the availability and nature of the material worked, the skill of the craftsmen handling it and the state of the weather.

The language of time accounting used in the Dock Yard strongly suggests that shipbuilding was an industry that had once been, and still was to some extent, related to natural time. Working time was measured in Days, Nights and Tides. Bell ringing was altered with the seasons and reflected the Yard authorities desire to make the best possible use of available daylight. Common entry and leaving times for the workmen were also important in preventing embezzlements.

The labour of the shipwrights may have become more intense when building slips were covered and may, generally, have been greater in workshops where close supervision was possible than afloat or on the dockside. However, rather than close supervision, the Yard officers relied on the self discipline entailed in piece rate working.

Another time-related problem that bedevilled civilian industrialists was absenteeism. It is clear that Yard workers were also liable to take

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/24 7.12.1801

days off work when they felt like it. In particular the smiths were liable to be absent from work, but other trade groups also lost time. In 1811 the officers in charge of the Rope House objected to a proposal to allow the men to go out of the Yard at dinner time because they thought that "... even the well disposed will not always be inclined to return."¹

Meal breaks were particularly valued by the Yard workers. As women were allowed into the Yard to bring their men their food and the men could go home, meal times were a means by which the family could encroach on the work situation. The Navy Board took a different view, seeing meal breaks as a threat to efficiency. In October 1804 the Board decided that because of the short winter days and fatigue the workmen were liable to by going home, the labourers and artificers were to remain in the Yard at dinner time. The shipwrights protested stating that it, "... is a pleasure to go home to our families to have a comfortable hot dinner which is a sweet refreshment."² To obtain their point the workers staged a walk-out and were successful.

Lost time was always taken into account when an individual was being considered for some mark of favour, such as promotion, an apprentice or action on a petition. Some men lost time owing to business interests outside the Yard; any man who kept a public house was liable to instant dismissal.³ There was a general limit to the amount of absenteeism that was tolerated by the Yard officers. In one instance forty days in one year was considered too great, in another nine days in a single quarter resulted in the dismissal of the men concerned.⁴ It is impossible to calculate how

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/26 3.1.1811

² N.M.M. POR/F/26 1.4.1805

" POR/G/2 3.4.1805

See below p. 315

³ N.M.M. POR/C/25 8.11.1808

⁴ N.M.M. POR/D/27 22.1.1797

N.M.M. POR/D/27 5.5.1797

Table 2.19

The Average Number of Men treated by the Surgeon of the Yard.

	<u>Peace</u>	<u>War</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Ordinary	932	540	42.0
Dock Yard	1929	2491	26.0
Rope Yard	200	261	30.5

War years based on 1798, 1799, 1801, 1804

Peace years 1785, 1786, 1787, 1792

The number of men in the Ordinary declined with the outbreak of the war as the reserve fleets were mobilised.

Table 2.20

Fincham's "Index of discipline" or Work Days lost.

1791	1 day in 95 lost
1792	" " " 103 lost
1793	" " " 100 "
1794	" " " 111 "
1795	" " " 83 "
1796	" " " 82 "
1797	" " " 62 "
1798	" " " 62 "
1799	" " " 65 "
1800	" " " 73 "
1801	" " " 62 "
1810	" " " 50 "
1820	" " " 139 "

many working days in a year were lost to the Navy Board by deliberate absenteeism, but some idea of the time lost through sickness and for other reasons in terms of man hours for shipwrights is available for certain years.¹ (See Table 2.18) These figures show that in war-time sickness and absenteeism were equal as causes of lost time, official leave being quite rare. The figures for time lost through sickness are the most interesting. In particular, the very high level of sick leave in the two years before the war suggests that perhaps during peace time such leave was more freely granted than during the war. This is all the more striking as the average number of men reported as sick by the surgeon rose sharply with the expanded work force.² (See Table 2.19) After 1793 the peak level of sickness occurred in 1795 and 1800, when food prices were also at their maximum. But too much must not be made of this as the source from which it was compiled in the mid-nineteenth century is not known. Further, it is not complete for our period and it is difficult to compare the figures with a norm.

Another set of data showing the days lost, from work by Portsmouth Yard workers was regarded by an ex-Yard Officer as an index of discipline.³ (See Table 2.20) It would seem clear that absenteeism increased markedly during the war. In 1810 there were twice as many days lost as there had been in 1793. This trend was probably related to the high earnings possible in wartime and points to a continuing rise in incomes throughout the war. Even so, a backward sloping supply curve for labour is not the only possible explanation for men taking time off. In 1808 it was noted that when Sundays were worked, weekday absenteeism was very high.⁴ Mass absenteeism took

¹ Fincham op.cit.

² N.M.M. POR/A/D/27 28.9.1805

³ Fincham op.cit.

⁴ P.R.O. ADM/106/1871 27.11.1808.

place on special occasions such as a fair or a critical vestry meeting.¹ Despite the frequency with which some workers appear to have been absent the problem of lost time never became worrying enough for the Navy Board to give it particular attention.

The area of labour control associated with productivity has already been considered, but there is another closely related aspect that has not. The maintenance of quality had an obvious importance in shipbuilding. The Navy Board always claimed that the cost of work done in its own Yards could not be compared to that done in civil ones because of the high quality of workmanship and materials it used. It is difficult to assess such a claim, but the Navy Board appears to have been anxious to maintain the highest standards of workmanship. Any example of "neglect" was carefully investigated and blame apportioned. For example, in 1811 a gang of caulkers, responsible for defective work, were put on single time for a fortnight and the quartermaster was fined a week's pay.² Such incidents, however, were exceptional.

As many skilled tasks were carried out at piece rates, the amount of work done, as well as the quality, had to be checked. This formed yet another control on the workers. How effective it was, especially in the early part of the period, is open to question. When General Bentham inspected copies of the Yard pay books he typified them as being full of "glaring instances of inaccuracy and inefficiency". It was not only output that was falsified.

"As to the falsification and abuse of setting down pay for a far greater time than had been worked, nay even to the amount of double what could possibly be worked I found it regularly and officially

¹ See above p. 80

² N.M.M. POR/P/ Nov. 1811.

tolerated I might say authorized."¹

1 Many years later another critic of the Dock Yards claimed that the shipwrights were adept at getting the same work measured twice.² It is interesting that no labour dispute appears to have centred around work measurement, suggesting that it may have operated to the benefit of the artificers. One has only to think of mining, where work measurement and quality checks were a frequent source of friction between men and management, to realise how this could be exploited to raise productivity in relation to labour costs.

The points raised so far have been related to particular aspects of labour control. More difficult to identify and describe is the general context of social behaviour in which discipline operated. This exercise requires a reconstruction of the attitudes of both the workers and managers. In this respect it would be useful to have a model of the ideal workman as envisaged by the Yard officers. Such a portrait can be drawn from officers' reports on individual artificers. Phrases such as "Sober obedient and a good workman" reveal what the Navy Board liked to find in the "character and abilities" of its employees. The importance of good time keeping in winning the authorities' approval has been noted, but petitions from individuals suggest that there was another consideration. A workman memorialising the Navy Board in 1795 hastened to assure them:

"That he is very zealous for Government and reprobates every measure which is at present practised to embarrass them who conduct the administration."³(SIC)

The Dock Yard liked its workmen to be politically sound as well as honest, but there is little evidence to suggest that steps were taken to

¹ M.S. Bentham op.cit. p.57

² R. Challenor The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (1972) p.68

³ P. Barry op.cit. p.57

³ POR/A/38 3.4.1795

ensure that they were loyal, though dishonesty was punished.¹ Even so it was in persistent pilfering that the Yard labour force most often fell short of the Officers' ideal.² Drunkenness was also a problem. Close control had to be exercised over the Tap, "to suppress all Riots, drunkenness and noise". The Board always suspected that accidents were a result of drinking, though intoxication by itself was not usually regarded as very serious.³ However, if the offence was aggravated by insolence, the Yard authorities took a more stringent view. One labourer was discharged:

"For skulking in the Taphouse this morning during the working hours and telling Mr. Simmons, the Boatswain, and one of the Rounders that he would be Damned if he would come before the Commissioner."⁴

For his part the Commissioner was always anxious that proper respect be shown to him and his subordinates. This discipline tended beyond just the workmen. Both Commissioner Grey and Commissioner Saxton had difficulties with the Yard Chaplain the Reverend Scott. Some comments of Grey are revealing of the general attitudes of the naval administration.

The Reverend Gentleman's behaviour had, Grey thought, been

"... utterly destructive of the subordination and harmony which in every Department of Government it is the duty of official men to maintain and cultivate"... "such a line of conduct if permitted with impunity in the Chaplain who above all other men ought to set a better example I fear may lead to serious evils by descending to the lower orders of the People."⁵

The key words in these passages are "subordination", "harmony" and "example". The Resident Commissioner, whose responsibility it was, desired to keep the Yard in a state of good discipline without inciting disorder and this could not be done by browbeating or intimidating the

¹ However two men were discharged for making seditious expressions in 1802. P.R.O. ADM 1. 2631 9.4.1802.

² See p. 403

³ N.M.M. POR/A/54 31.1.1811

⁴ N.M.M. POR/A/60 27.9.1808

⁵ N.M.M. POR/F/17 5.2.1810

N.M.M. POR/H/17 28.2.1810

workers. This can be illustrated by reference to an incident in which the shipwrights claimed that a quartermaster had struck one of their fellow workmen.¹ One suspects that the Yard officers may have been tempted to buy a quiet life by tolerating certain minor frauds and abuses. In return for illegitimately inflated incomes, the workers accepted the outward manifestations of subordination. It is also likely that self respect and a general standard of good behaviour prevented the craftsmen from normally being intractable or disorderly.

The novelist Captain Marryat provides an interesting portrait of the Dock Yard at work during the Napoleonic Wars. Peter Simple, a young midshipman, is sent for the first time, to Portsmouth Dock Yard in command of a boat.

"When we arrived there, I was quite astonished at the pile of timbers, the ranges of storehouses, and the immense anchors which lay on the wharf. There was such a bustle, everybody appeared to be so busy that I wanted to look everyway at once. Close to where the boat landed, they were hauling a large frigate out of what they called a basin; and I was so interested with the sight, that I am sorry to say, I forgot all about the boats crew and my orders to look after them. What surprised me most was that although the men employed appeared to be sailors, their language was very different from what I have lately been accustomed to on board the frigate. Instead of damming and swearing, everybody was so polite. 'Oblige me with a pull of the starboard bow hawser if you please' - 'Side her over, gentlemen, side her over -' 'My compliments to Mr. Tompkins and request that he will cast her off the quarter check -' 'Side her over gentlemen, side her over if you please' - 'In the boat there pull to Mr. Simmonds, and beg he'll do me the favour to check her as she swings. What's the matter, Mr. Johnson?' 'Vy, there's one of them 'ere midshipmites has thrown a red hot tater out of the sternport, and hit our officer in the eye."

'Report him to the Commissioner Mr. Wiggins and oblige me by under-running the guess warp. Tell Mr. Simpkins, with my compliments to call away upon the jetty. Side her over, side her over, gentlemen, if you please'

I asked of a bystander who these people were, and he told me that they were dockyard mateys. I certainly thought that it appeared to be quite as easy to say 'If you please', as 'D-n your eyes' and and that it sounded much more agreeable."²

¹ See below p. 335

² F. Marryatt Peter Simple (1839)

Table 2.21 Men dismissed from the Dock Yard 1793 to 1802

	Abuse	Disobe- dience	Drunken- ness & Abuse	Neglect	Riotous Beha- viour	Other	Total
Bricklayers	1						1
Bricklayers Labourers		2					2
House Carpenters				1		1	2
Joiners			1				1
Labourers			2	4		1	7
Masons				2			2
Riggers		1			2		3
Riggers Labourers			2	5	4	2	13
Sailmakers				1			1
Scavelmen				1			1
Smiths							
Total	1	3	5	14	6	4	33

That Marryat was not taking too great a poetic licence is shown by an episode recorded in the Yard books. A joiner, Thomas Bowyer has saved a child from drowning and in the course of doing so had heard the Mate say; "Damn the son of a Bitch we will flog him" Bowyer not knowing who had spoken said: "What Brute is making use of such expressions" and was reprimanded for insubordination.¹ Compared to seamen the Yard people were probably very polite and well disciplined; they were certainly preferred by the farmers and gentry of the county when it came to forming work-parties to launch Navy vessels built in ~~other~~ merchant yards.²

It is not possible to give an overall assessment of the number of men who were disciplined in the Yard, or their offences. However, some idea can be obtained for the period 1793 to 1802 and for certain trades. These figures do not include those discharged for theft or for participation in a major labour dispute in 1801. (Table 2.21).

From these data it is clear that the Yard's unskilled workmen were the most liable to be punished for indiscipline, though this list excludes shipwrights and caulkers. It is interesting that riggers labourers are the most prominent group on the table for as will be shown they were liable to embezzle the Yards stores. As the riggers were also prominent as thieves the men of the rigging loft obviously posed special problems for the Yard management.

Quantitative data relating to work discipline are hard to find. Fortunately S.D. Chapman has given some figures for two textile factories.³ Admittedly the textile industry and naval shipbuilding are very different

1 N.M.M. POR/D/27 28.8.1797

2 See p.

3 S.D. Chapman Early Factory Masters (Newton Abbot 1967) p.185.

sorts of enterprise but the comparison is worthwhile as they were both interesting variants of industrial employment and both were interested in providing long term employment in a relatively confined situation.

Table 2.22 Labour problems at Hawksley's Arnold Mill. Analysis of cases brought before Arnold Petty Sessions 1794-1804.

Absconded	49
Riot and Assault	19
Disobedience	9
Spoiling work	-
Other	-
Total	77

The work force involved was expanding from about seven hundred to approximately two thousand and included women and children as well as men. This firm had notoriously bad labour relations, though an improvement is discernible as the firm became better established. Poor labour relations may explain why a civilian firm had to discipline more workers than the Dock Yard, though Yard workers were nearly all adult males.

In the case of the second firm, Robinson Mills, with a labour force of fifteen hundred to two thousand, only thirty two cases of indiscipline were taken before the petty sessions. It would appear therefore, that the Dock Yard had no particularly grave problem with regard to the control of labour. We must consider how that control was maintained.

The regulations of the Dock Yard were complex and consisted for much of this period in various standing orders made by the Navy Board. A digest of these was made in 1786 but unsystematic additions continued

until a formal set of instructions was drawn up in 1806.¹ Even these were not as far reaching as some of the rule books drafted by civilian industrialists. Nor did the Yard have a systematic method of punishing recalcitrant workers. Fines were rarely used and then mainly in an attempt to prevent absenteeism among the night watch.² Another tactic was to refuse overtime to poor workmen for periods of varying length. A longer term policy was associated with the apprenticeship system. Servants were deliberately granted as a reward for good general behaviour or a particular service. In 1810 a number of workmen were given to certain artificers, "... being the best workmen in the Yard sober honest and always obedient to command."³

Similarly, a favourable response to an individual's petition depended on a favourable report about them from the Yard Officers, such as "... his Character and Abilities as a workman are such as we think him deserving of the Indulgence."

In the case of apprentices, troublesome individuals could be taken before the magistrates in the same way that any master could, but this was a bothersome procedure. Two apprentice smiths were gaoled for losing time and neglecting their duty, though it cost £5 to do so. The Yard Officers hoped that the money was well spent.

"... having been severely reprimanded by the Magistrates for their past misconduct and have cautioned them to conduct themselves better for the future, they have in consequence so far attended their duty and we hope it will prove a striking terror to them to avoid the evils to come."⁴

¹ P.P. 1806 (192) V 415. op.cit.
 N.M.M. POR/A/51 16.1.1809
 N.M.M. POR/A/53 3.9.1809
² See p.419
³ N.M.M. POR/D/28 22.10.1810
⁴ N.M.M. POR/D/28 19.8.1808

However, these hopes were ill-founded. The boys had to be imprisoned three times and the magistrates finally proposed to cancel the indentures. The Commissioner noted that if they were dismissed, "they will have obtained their ends."¹ He suggested that the boys should be sent aboard a naval ship "where they will be useful subjects". The Navy Board did not feel that it was empowered to do this, though it did begin to insert clauses in indentures that cancelled them automatically in cases of bad behaviour. In general, the apprentices and boys in the Yard appear to have been a source of disorder and on several occasions they came to the attention of the Commissioner, for horseplay, throwing stones or loitering.

The threat of impressment must have been a very powerful deterrent against disorderly conduct. Dock Yard workers were given protection but this ceased to be effective on discharge from the Yard. However, the Navy appears to have made little use of this weapon. It was considered in 1801 as a means of stopping workmen leaving the Yard, and embezzlers were actually sent to the fleet.² Yet, it must be remembered that compulsory enlistment was used quite frequently by the courts.³ Only one major example is available of impressment being used as a means of discipline and this was very early in the war, when mobilisation was in full swing. Some labourers had been under-ballasting vessels by distracting the supervisor's attention and throwing the gravel short so that it fell into the sea. Commissioner Saxton reported:

"I have as a terror to the rest ordered thirty of the oldest standards who have been consequently longest in the practice (which has continued for years in all likelihood) to be delivered to such of His Majesty's Ships at Spithead, as the Admiral shall appoint."⁴

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/29 29.9.1808

² See p. 403

³ L. Radzinowicz A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration IV (1968) p.87

⁴ N.M.M. POR/F/20 7.4.1793

Normally, however, the Commissioner had to rely on the same devices to prevent such practices as did civilian employers. In a way it is surprising that men who had been trained in the naval service and had experienced the awesome power of a Naval Captain could run so smoothly, large industrial units with a civilian labour force, without recourse to any special authority.

It seems clear that the civil branch of the Navy was well aware of the importance of incentive in obtaining labour co-operation, more so than many civilian employers. Unlike the labour forces of many industrial plants the Dock Yard workers were, many of them, skilled men following traditional crafts, not factory fodder thrust into a new social and economic situation. Even so, there was a body of thought that believed that the more highly skilled workers were, the more troublesome they became. As Andrew Ure, the early industrial observer said:

"By the infirmity of human nature it happens that the more skillful the workman the more self willed and intractable he is apt to become and of course, the less fit a component of a mechanised system."¹

On the other hand it has been noted that at least one Yard officer thought that the most skilled workmen were a good influence on the other artificers.

One wonders if there existed in the Dock Yard an understanding between workmen and management to co-operate, as far as possible, to obtain that "harmony" so valued by the Commissioner, a reasonable level of productivity and effort being rewarded by fairly lax supervision and artificially inflated incomes. This was the sort of human and personal solution to labour control that infuriated rationalists like General Bentham and the men who sat on Parliamentary enquiries.

¹ Andrew Ure The Philosophy of Manufacturers. (1835) p.20.

In general it would appear that the Dock Yard authorities had no more resources for directing their work force than did any factory master and that they used what they did have, a system of supervision, rewards and minor punishments, in a more flexible manner and less harshly than did civilian bosses. The Dock Yards generated none of the atrocity stories that the new factories did, nor did they experience the hostility that many of the labouring poor felt towards the factories. The Yard craftsmen and labourers were more amenable to direction and control than were the employees of great textile and other industrial plants. No list of elaborate rules and fines, no monitors silent or otherwise and no child beating appears to have existed in the Yard. Though labour discipline in the Dock Yards was different from that experienced by many workers elsewhere, this had nothing to do with the Dock Yard's links with the armed forces or the bureaucratic nature of Naval administration.

Were the artificers and labourers who worked in Portsmouth Dock Yard committed to an industrial mode of life? This is a difficult question and a final answer cannot be given here. Yet it is possible to suggest where we might look further for some part of the answer. An examination of thefts from the Yard, industrial disputes between the Yard workmen and the Yard authorities and an attempt to assess the Yard Peoples' political and economic views will all indicate something more of the Dock Yard workers' industrial commitment.

Technical Glossary

Block	The outer part of a block and pulley.
Bolt	A shaft of metal an inch to two inches in diameter and up to several feet in length used to peg a wooden vessel together.
Canting-hook	A crow bar with a ring at one end used with a lever to turn a large piece of timber.
Caulking	The process of rendering a vessel water-tight by filling and sealing the cracks between the planks.
Ceiling	The inboard planking of a ships sides.
Channel-wale	A girdle of thick timbers running around a ship opposite the upper-deck.
Conversing	Shaping timber to a desired shape.
Deadwood	The blocks of wood rising from the keel at either end to raise the floor of the vessel.
Fashion-pieces	Timbers rising from the keelson at the stem of the ship.
False-keel	A timber placed below the keel so as to protect it.
Floor-timbers	The timbers forming the bottom most part of a ship's frame.
Filling-timbers	The timbers between the main ribs of the ship's frame.
Futtocks	The timbers forming the middle sections of a ship's frame rising from the floor timbers.
Garboard streak	The lowest plank of a ship's bottom.
Hatchelling	Combing hemp over a set of metal teeth, in order to straighten the staple.
Keel	The backbone of the ship.
Kelson	A timber laid above the keel and locking the floor-timbers in place between it and the keel.
Knee	An L-shaped piece of timber generally used to join the sides and beams of a ship.

Main-whale	A girdle of thick timber running around the ship opposite the lower-deck.
Mould	A thin flexible piece of wood used as a pattern for cutting the different timbers of a ship.
Oakum	Old hemp obtained from used rope.
Orlop-deck	The bottom most deck.
Rabbet	A deep groove cut along the length of a timber so that a plank can be fitted to it.
Ribbands	Narrow flexible lengths of wood nailed along the side of a ship's frame to obtain and hold the correct curvature.
Scarf	An overlapping joint.
Stem	A timber curving upwards from the bow-end of the keel.
Stern-post	A timber rising with a backward curve from the stern-end of the keel.
Thick-stuff	Thick strong planking on the ship's sides.
Transom	Beams of timber across the stern of the ship.
Treenail	An oaken peg.
Top	<p>1) Ropemaking A wooden cone placed between the strands of a rope so as to maintain tension as they are twisted together.</p> <p>2) Shipbuilding A platform at the head of the lower mast.</p>
Wolder	A rope and lever used to maintain the tension in a rope as it is layed.

VOLUME II

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CHAPTER III LABOUR UNREST

Chronology of labour disputes and incidents
(Pet = petition)

DATE	TRADE GROUPS	INCIDENT
2.1793	Hemp spinners and dressers	Pet. for Sunday extra
2.1793	Extramens	Pet. for protection from impressment
10.1793	Shipwrights in mast and boathouses	Pet. on wages and hours
1.1794	Ropemakers	Pet. on working conditions and Sunday extra
4.1794	Shipwrights	Refusal to work in a dirty ship
10.1794	Ropemakers	Pet. on wages
12.1794	-	<i>Anonymous notice and minor disturbance over naval mutineers</i>
2.1795	Deptford shipwrights	Pet. to return home
2.1795	Shipwrights	Dilution dispute
3.1795	Deptford and Woolwich shipwrights	Pet. to return home
4.1795	Smiths	Pet. on hours
7.1795	Sawyers	Pet. on wages
7.1795	Hemp spinners and dressers	Pet. on Sunday extra
7.1795	Ropemakers	Pet. on wages and extra
10.1797	Foremen and Quartermen	Pet. for extra
1.1796	Deptford shipwrights	Pet. for away from home allowance
3.1796	Hemp spinners and dressers	Pet. for Sunday extra
3.1796	Ropemakers	Dispute over change of raw material
4.1796	Shipwrights Cabin-keepers	Pet. for extra
5.1796	Deptford, Woolwich and Chatham Shipwrights	Pet. for away from home allowance
7.1796	Deptford caulkers	Pet. asking to return home
8.1796	-	Protests over the flogging of a militia man

1.1797	Sawyers	Pet. for injury allowance
4.1797	Scavelman	Pet. wages
4.1797	Deptford and Woolwich caulkers and Chatham Shipwrights	Pet. to return home
4.1797	-	Incident over Quartermen striking a workman
5.1797	Visiting caulkers and shipwrights	Pet. to go home
6.1797	Smiths	Complaint about their beer
11.1797	Yard people	Pet. for a holiday
12.1797	Quartermen of the Woolwich gang	Pet. wages
4.1798	Yard people	Pet. delay in paying wages
4.1798	Storehouse labourers	Pet. on hours
6.1798	Deptford shipwrights and caulkers	Pet. to return home and a counter petition
8.1798	Deptford caulkers	Pet. to return home
3.1799	Ropemakers	Disturbance over Mr. Balfour's machine
3.1799	Storehouse labourers	Pet. on hours
7.1799	Woolwich shipwrights	Pet. to return home
7.1799	Ropemakers	Refusing to move finished ropes
1.1800	Shipwrights	Pet. for an allowance in lieu of chips
7.1800	Shipwrights from the Thames and Medway	Dispute with warders
10.1800	Ropemakers	Pet. on wages
12.1800	Hemp spinners	Pet. on wages
1.1801	Smiths	Pet. on hours
3.1801	Smiths	Pet. on beer
3 & 4.1801 National Dock Yard Disputes		
5.1801	Sailmakers	Pet. on hours
7.1802	Sailmakers	Pet. for chips allowance
8.1802	Dispute in the Thames Civilian Yard	

11.1802	Teamsters	
5.1803	Labourers serving as cabinkeepers and warders	Pet. on wages
9.1803	Smiths	Pet. on hours
10.1803	Smiths	Pet. chip allowance
4.1803	Smiths	Pet. on hours
6.1803	Messengers	Pet. on wages
6.1803	Scavelmen	Pet. on wages
8.1803	Sailmakers	Pet. on hours and task
8.1803	Shipwrights in cabins	Pet on wages
2.1805	Riggers' labourers	Pet. on wages
1.1805	Quartermen	Pet. for injuries allowance
3.1805	Painters	Pet. on wages
4.1805	Yard people	Dinnertime dispute
7.1805	Sailmakers	Pet. on hours and tasks
8.1805	Warders	Pet. on wages
8.1805	Millwrights	Dispute over wages
10.1805	Men in woodmills	Dispute over hours
11.1805	Millwrights	Dispute over trade club rules
9.1806	Millwrights	Strike

CHAPTER 111

This chapter is an examination of the disputes that arose between the Dock Yard authorities and their employees 1793-1815. The main concern is to detail the types of action used by the workmen and to consider whether these activities can properly be regarded as trade unionism. To help answer this question the historiography of eighteenth century labour agitation is drawn upon to define the concept of "ad hoc unionism".

Disputes in the Dock Yard provide material for a detailed consideration of this concept. The possibility that the Yard artificers concealed their unions is rejected after an examination of potential host organisations such as co-operatives. But before this is done a particular form of ad hoc unionism, petitioning, is investigated.

The foundations of English labour organisations were laid in the eighteenth century. Innumerable strikes and combinations have been noted during this period, as have the many anti-combination laws. Trades such as the printers, bookbinders and textile workers have been examined in detail (1) yet no systematic and general study has been made of eighteenth century unionism. The research that has been done has tended to take the line of least resistance by concentrating on labour activity which corresponded most closely to later developments, trade societies with well established

- (1) E.H. Howe and H.E. Waite The London Society of Compositors. 1785-1900 (1948)
 E.H. Howe and I. Child The London Society of Bookbinders. 1780-1951 (1952)
 A.P. Wadsworth and J. De l'Man The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire (1931)
 H.A. Turner Trade Union Growth Structure and Policy (1962)
 W.H. Warburton The History of Trade Union Organisation in the North Staffordshire Potteries (1931)
 F.W. Galton Select Documents Illustrating the History of Trade Unionism (1896)
 N.H. Cuthbert The Lace Makers Society (1960)

organisations, a hierarchy of officials, recognised procedure, and, most critically, written records. (1) Other forms of labour associations before the 1850's which have left little or no documentation have been largely ignored, though Luddism and Captain Swing are exceptions to this. (2) But the scarcity of material is not the only reason why eighteenth century combinations are regarded as the mere embryo of fully developed nineteenth century trade unions. The myopia of labour historians has been strengthened by the authority of the Webbs whose pioneering work on the history of trade unions, containing their definition of a union, has exerted considerable influence.

"A Trade Union as we understand it (they wrote), is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives." (3)

Not only have historians operated with too rigid and narrow a definition; some have shared the Webbs' "Whiggism" denigrating weakly, or unorganised, workers as primitive or retarded. However limited it was, the Webbs' work has proved fruitful and is capable of being built upon. Without a doubt by "continuous association" the Webbs meant what latter historians have understood as formal association. But H.A. Turner has pointed out "continuous association" is not necessarily the same thing as formal organisation,

"...people of the same occupation who are regularly brought together in the same workshop or town may acknowledge regular leaders, develop customs of work regulation and systematic "trade practices" and produce a disciplined observance of the latter without embedding these procedures in any formal records. (4)

Such unionism appears to the historian as disjointed, spasmodic and even spontaneous, for he looks in vain for evidence of a

- (1) E.J. Hobsbawm Labouring Men, The Machine Breakers (1964)
- (2) The Webbs as Historians Labour History Society Bulletin No.4 (1962)
A.E. Musson British Trade Unions 1800-1875 (1972) p.14
- (3) S & B. Webb A History of Trade Unionism (1965)
- (4) H.A. Turner op.cit.

continuous and formal organisation. In times of quiescence or severe repression, combinations could "submerge" into everyday features of workingmen's lives. The existence of the union is revealed by "...the persistence of certain reiterated collective pressures of consistent tendencies to collective action. It is perhaps in these rather than in particular constitutional forms that the essence of trade unionism consists. (1)

Even the Webbs went part way to recognising that unions could exist with a great deal of informality and frequent changes of leadership.

"In this earliest type of trade union democracy we find, in fact, the most childlike faith not only that "all men are equal" but that also "what concerns all men should be decided by all." (2)

The Webbs would not go as far as G.D.H. Cole, who defined a union as simply a body of workers combining together to obtain things which acting as individuals they could not have achieved. (3) However, if the Webbs' definition is too rigid, Coles' is too wide, and a median must be found to describe those union-type activities conducted by working men without formalised institutions. Therefore, we wish to put forward a definition of "ad hoc unionism".

By "ad hoc unionism" is meant short-term but repeated actions by wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving their condition at work without any formal or long-term organisations. While the term "ad hoc" emphasises the intermittent nature of the organisation involved, temporary committees for specific issues, the very act of naming the phenomena underlines that these bodies reflect a permanent attitude based on custom and memory. Both

(1) Ibid

(2) S & B. Webb Industrial Democracy (1913)

(3) G.D.H. Cole An Introduction to Trade Unionism (1953) p.13

the temporary organisation and the normative aspects of "ad hoc unionism" are important, though it is difficult to find a single term that does justice to both. "Ad hoc unionism", as defined, can replace phrases such as : "natural unionism", "temporary combinations", "semi-permanent combinations" and "spontaneous reaction to specific crises". (1)

The concept serves to emphasise those common features of early labour disputes which, though noted by individual historians have not been seen in general perspective. Moreover, its use resolves a paradox which raises itself if the traditional analysis of unionism is applied to the Royal Dock Yards.

Besides their emphasis on the institutional nature of trade unionism the Webbs also laid down, as a historical determinant of trade union development, that the workers had to be divorced from the means of production. They qualified this material definition by adding a moral condition: "The formation of independent associations to resist the will of employers requires the possession of a certain degree of independence and strength of character." (2) The division between capital and labour was also seen as crucial by Marx, who thought that the concentration of labour that this process implied would create the type of personality who would look naturally to combination as a means of self-protection against his employers. (3) Thus two schools of thought in labour history lead us to expect the existence of organised unions in Portsmouth naval arsenal which was a very large industrial unit where labour and ownership had always been

(1) Warburton op.at p.29

N.H. Cuthbert op.at p.8

R.B. Rose A Liverpool Sailor's Strike in the Eighteenth Century Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society LXV111 (1959) pp 249-65

T. Lane The Union Makes Us Strong (1974)

(2) S & B. Webb Industrial Democracy op. at p.44

(3) R. Hyman Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (1971) p.44

completely separated; yet formal unionism does not appear there until the late nineteenth century. (1) An additional anomaly is that permanent organisations were supported by civilian industries that conformed much more closely to the Master, journeyman and workshop pattern of production than they did to the capitalist mode. These dilemmas are resolved if trade unions, in the Webb sense, are not seen as part of an inevitable historical process and if ad hoc unionism is recognised as the form of activity best suited to the needs of the men who used it. While ad hoc unions worked there was no need to replace them and participation in them led to the slow gain of experience and skills which provided the foundation for later developments. The fact that "ad hoc unions" may have been replaced by other forms of labour action is no reason to regard them as primitive or infantile. The amoeba, the grandfather of us all, is a separate organism functioning quite efficiently alongside more complicated and more highly evolved cell structures. In no way is it an infantile or embryonic human, though mankind's origins may be related to it. If formal unions and informal combinations are not contrasted but seen as fulfilling the same key functions in different situations, which may coexist, then our understanding of early trade union history can be extended in both breadth and depth. Attention will simultaneously be directed towards the similarities in a variety of labour protests and demonstrations, and towards the differences in their context. A study of Portsmouth Dock Yard shows that trade union development cannot be explained merely by reference to the mode of production or moral judgments about individual character or mass consciousness and that different forms of trade union-type activity can coexist.

(1) L.S.E. Webb Collection E. Section A Vol.32

By 1793 the Dock Yards had a long tradition of labour militancy involving well tried methods of conducting industrial conflict. (1) These included co-ordinated inter-yard petitioning, public appeals for support (2), and strikes. D. Baugh notes a change in the nature of these actions dating from about the 1740's when they became concerned with securing higher incomes and not, as previously, with securing arrears of wages. (3) In 1775 another type of dispute occurred when the shipwrights stood out against the introduction of piece work. (4) Common to all these actions was the rhetoric of eighteenth century protest. Demands were made for lost "Rights and Privileges" and there were calls for "Justice" and "Liberty", "... which is all true English men's lives and souls", and protests against "Tyranny"; though formal politeness was maintained in petitions to the Boards of the Admiralty and Navy and to the "King's most Excellent Majesty". (5) The period 1793 to 1815 was to see further developments in these traditions.

- (1) J. Ehrman The Navy in the Wars of William III 1689-1697
(Cambridge 1953)
D. Baugh op. cit.
J.M. Haas op. cit.
B. McL Ranft. Labour Relations in the Royal Dockyards in
1773 M.M. XLVI (1961) 281-291
- (2) W. Shrubsole A Plea in Favour of the Shipwrights belonging to
the Royal Dock Yards (1770)
- (3) D. Baugh op. cit. p.327
- (4) J.M. Haas op. cit.
- (5) D. Baugh op. cit. p.324
B. McL Ranft op.cit. p.287
W. Shrubsole op. cit.
J.M. Haas op. cit. p.63

The Ropemakers

Labour unrest in the Dock Yards began almost as soon as war broke out when the line and twine spinners and hemp dressers asked for more money for working on Sundays. If they hoped to take advantage of the Navy Board during mobilisation the rope workers made a misjudgement. The Board refused their request as contrary to existing regulations. (1) A year later however, it was the Resident Commissioners' opinion that the men had been incited by the Clerk of the Rope Yard who disliked Sunday work. (2) Sunday working caused fresh trouble with the rope makers. The Navy Board had approved weekend overtime in the previous December but shortly afterwards reduced the rate for such work, probably in order to cut the total wage bill from the customary three days pay to two days for one. (3) The result was immediate, and Commissioner Saxton wrote hurriedly to the Navy Board :

"Since my letter of last night relative to the Ropemakers, I have reason to believe that the People have been corrupted (and I cannot help concluding by those most interested) and are disposed to dispute the point of double time for working Sundays in order that I might not be obliged to come to the point till it has been further discussed and I believe the way to keep the peace is never employ them on a Sunday if it can by any means be avoided." (4)

Initially, it would appear that the Navy Board gave way, for it ordered that the men be paid a treble day for Sundays. (5) After the receipt of Saxton's letter the Commissioners changed their minds and commanded that the ropemakers were not to work at all on the weekend. (6) However, the dispute dragged on and the

- (1) NMM POR/D/26 19.2.1793
- (2) PRO ADM 106, 1866 20.2.1793
- (3) NMM POR/F/21 3.1.1794
- (4) NMM POR/F/21 4.1.1794
- (5) NMM POR/A/37 4.2.1794
- (6) NMM POR/A/37 6.1.1794

Commissioner reported another visit from the ropemakers' deputies. Saxton had a trump card to play; for besides this local affair the ropemakers had been involved in much wider negotiations, if that term can be applied to petitioning. A memorial from two ropemakers of Chatham and Woolwich had been received by the Navy Board. On behalf of all ropemakers employed by the government the petitioners asked to be put on the same footing as all the other artificers in the Yards. (1) The Navy Board agreed that the ropemakers should be compensated when injured at work and be allowed a half day's rest on pay days in common with other Dock Yard employees. (2) Saxton informed the men that came to see him of this :

"I likewise left them to consult and determine whether in consideration of these new indulgences it would not be prudent to accede one and all to the Board's order." (3)

For the time being the situation was quiet, but in October the ropemakers were again petitioning; this time for an advance of wages and the promise of one and a half days working in peace. The pay increase was refused, though the Board promised to implement the second demand, "when the service will admit of it"; a rather meaningless formula. The important point is the long term nature of this claim. The ropemakers were clearly able to recognise their own interests and pursue them at those times when they might be thought to have greatest bargaining power. A reference in 1793 shows that they had a permanent organisation of some scope. In that year, Saxton warned the Navy Board : "I understand letters have been received by the Ropehouse People here from what they call a secretary of their Association in town." (4)

(1) NMM POR/A/37 11.1.1794

(2) NMM POR/A/37 8.10.1794

(3) NMM POR/F/21 13.1.1794

(4) NMM POR/F/21 28.11.1794

By town Saxton presumably meant London

No further details of this combination are given.

The next dispute occurred simultaneously with trouble between the Navy Board and the shipwrights. In the middle of the negotiations between the shipwrights and the Board, the spinners and dressers presented a petition requesting to be allowed the same indulgences as their fellows in Woolwich Yard. They were given a holiday on pay days and the wheelboys were granted an allowance for working their dinner hour, but the Board denied that the Woolwich people were paid extra for working Sundays. (1) Even so, the workmen were not willing to forego their demands and in July returned to the issue of Sunday extra, stating that they had worked the last three Sundays without receiving any overtime money. (2) The Navy Board relented, ordering that on such occasions spinners and dressers were to be paid twenty pence. (3) However, this issue was overtaken by a national dispute that may have involved civilian yards.

The Navy Board had rejected a petition from all the ropeyards for an increase in wages. A few days later Saxton warned his superiors : "...our ropemakers in emulation of or by invitation from the other yards are restless and in some commotion." A deputation was sent to see him to demand a wage increase of seven pence a quarter year, but he refused to receive them after pointing out, "...the countences and indulgences that (they) had in so many Instances of late experienced from the Board." Saxton told the men, "That they must be very industrious to find out complaints in the midst of so many indulgences." (4)

- (1) NMM POR/A/38 5.2.1795
- (2) NMM POR/A/38 2.7.1795
- (3) NMM POR/A/38 14.7.1795
- (4) NMM POR/F/21 29.7.1795

An interlude of three weeks followed; then fifteen men left off work early. This action was repeated by seventy-five men next day. The Commissioner said that for the moment he was going to ignore the incident until an approach was made to him, but he thought that the first fifteen men to leave ought to be discharged. Saxton doubted that "this disposition is general among them." Adding : "There is one James Balf an incorrigible fellow among them I believe who has asked his discharge to go to London to join the combination." The order preventing Balf discharging himself half-way through the quarter had been sent too late to stop his departure. (1) The next day the Commissioner told the Board :

"All our refractory Ropemakers are returned to their work except about Eight. I shall continue to temporize with them as long as it is prudent and at a proper opportunity to harrangue them in order to show them that they are not entitled to leave their work when they please without being chequed for so doing." (2)

A couple of days later all but two of the workers had returned. (3)

There may be some significance in the timing of this dispute, for it took place at a critical period in the rope yard's calendar. Late summer saw hectic activity as the Yard Officers tried to get the newly arrived hemp ships cleared and their loads safely stored. This task required extra exertions from the ropery workforce and the Yard labourers. It also meant a reduction of weekly earnings.

The ropemakers were involved at this time, in forming a committee to approach the Navy Board for permission to use the services of the Dock Yard surgeons. The nature of their employment meant frequent attendance upon a doctor. (4)

- (1) NMM POR/F/21 31.8.1795
- (2) NMM POR/F/21 1.9.1795
- (3) NMM POR/A/38 3.9.1795
- (4) PRO ADM/106 1881 28.9.1795

Within six months yet another dispute preceded by complaints from the spinners and dressers, had broken out. The petitioners began by thanking the Navy Board for their increased wages but went on to complain that, though the layers were working Sunday overtime, they were not. If the Board granted further extra it would, the spinners claimed, "...give relief to a number of families who are at this time hard put to it to maintain themselves and their families which are in general very large." (1)

The Yard Officers maintained that there was no need for the spinners and dressers to be employed on Sundays; in their opinion the petitioners were only trying to establish the right to work on Sundays whenever the layers did. (2) Nonetheless, by December the line and twine spinners were unable to supply all of the Yard's needs. In January of the following year the foreman of spinners at Woolwich was trying to recruit men for Portsmouth, though because the private rope grounds offered higher wages, he was short of labour himself. (3)

The cause of the discontent among the rope layers was the change of raw material from topped Petersburg hemp to hatchelled Riga hemp. (4)

"...some of the most refractory of the Ropemakers of every occasion objected to work it hatchelled and prevailed with the rest of them, after they had worked half a day to quit their work and go home. This morning the greatest part of them came to call but refused going to work for sometime until they were informed by way of compromise for the present that this alteration was no more than temporary ... on which they went to work again and have been very peaceable the whole day ... from some expressions they dropt we do not think it improbable that they will correspond with the other yards on this occasion." (5)

- (1) NMM POR/A/39 4.3.1796
- (2) NMM POR/F/22 5.3.1796
NMM POR/D/27 11.3.1796
- (3) NMM POR/G/1 3.12.1796
NMM POR/G/1 6.1.1799
- (4) The switch to Riga hemp was made on the recommendation of the Dock Yard Officers because a scarcity of Petersburg hemp had raised its price. PRO ADM 106 3.2.1795
- (5) NMM POR/D/27 18.3.1796

In fact the Riga hemp was put back into store, temporarily at least. Some resistance to innovations that they thought threatened them was a fairly common ropemakers tactic, and the next dispute they were involved in was of this nature.

In 1798 a new ropemaking machine, designed by a Mr. Balfour, was set up in the Yard; by January of the next year it was ready to be set to work but the ropemakers protested. Saxton reported : "They yesterday shewed some disposition to be refractory on the subject ..." He went on to remark : "I wish from the merits I conceive of Mr. Balfour's machine that it will not have to struggle with violent prejudices that generally attend new inventions with the Officers as well as the workmen and be set aside like the horse machine." (1)

This "horse machine", the invention of one Mr. Seymour, had been sent to Portsmouth in 1793. There is a little confusion regarding Seymour's device. Saxton put it into store as soon as it arrived, not even informing his officers, and referred to it as a "horse machine". In Seymour's patent, however, there is no indication that animal power was to be applied to ropemaking. (2) "I am fearfull, (wrote Saxton), the introduction of it may at this critical moment stir up the prejudices of the People of our Ropehouse and involve us in more difficulties (if it should so happen) than we are at present aware of." (3) In the case of Balfour's machine, the Commissioner thought that the new rate of earnings accompanying it would satisfy the men. But the dissatisfaction appears to have been more general, for at the end of the month he had to write of the "restless and refractory spirit of the ropemakers

(1) NMM POR/F/23 12.1.1799

(2) Patent Office B. Patent 1537(1784) See above p.216

(3) NMM POR/F/21 28.11.1793

in this yard - surpassing all others in my opinion - without knowing where to place the cause". They had walked out demanding more pay for making seventeen and a half inch cables. The Commissioner refused to alter the rate, telling the workmen that if they did not like his decision they could leave immediately. "I am in hopes that by thus Dividing them this troublesome spirit will not be found among very many of them. (1) In this hope Saxton was apparently correct, for the next day they were all back at work, though two weeks later there was what might have been an attempt to sabotage Balfour's machine.(2) An axle broke and, though it was expert opinion that it was not strong enough for its function, Saxton confided to the Board, "...the difficulty with me is to reconcile its breaking when making a strand of seventeen and a quarter inches only and its not doing so in making one of twenty-four inches. (3) After this incident Saxton reported that he was keeping a careful watch on the workers in the ropeyard. (4)

In July, information was brought to him that the ropemakers were intending to refuse to carry ropes to the weighbridge and storehouse. A confrontation was avoided by paying the men extra. It was recognised by the Officers that this job was not properly part of the ropemaker's duties. (5) As no further trouble occurred until 1800, the men of the ropeyard may have been temporarily pacified by this and the greater overtime that the new machine enabled them to work.

The hemp deliveries of 1800 brought fresh disturbances which were probably related to the famine prices of that year. In late

- (1) NMM POR/F/23 31.1.1799
- (2) NMM POR/F/23 1.2.1799
- (3) NMM POR/F/23 12.3.1799
- (4) NMM POR/F/23 3.4.1799
- (5) NMM POR/F/23 4.4.1799
- NMM POR/C/24 8.4.1799
- NMM POR/G/1 11.7.1799

September the Portsmouth ropemakers petitioned to be allowed to work in the same manner as those at Chatham and Woolwich. As the petition was not sent through the proper channels, the Navy Board refused to acknowledge it. A few weeks later the ropemakers were refusing to unload hemp unless they were paid at the same rate as the other yards. This proved rather more effective than sending memorials and the Navy Board said that they had no objection to the men working three for one during daylight. Even so, the ropemakers were refusing to unload hemp at the beginning of 1801, "...upon any conditions short of the practice of other yards." (1) Sir Charles Saxton decided to tackle this latest incident with a lock-out, refusing to muster those who struck. This policy seems to have been one of deliberate confrontation, and when the rest of the ropemakers stood out in protest, he said that it was what he had expected. His tactics worked and a delegation of eight or ten that came to see him reached an agreement of which a part was that the suspended men should be reinstated. (2) The spinners were also agitating, but their request was refused. (3) After this date there is a marked decline in disputes involving the ropemakers. A review of those disputes previously detailed identifies the issues that concerned them.

First, it can be noted that innovations in techniques and methods, while causing a certain degree of friction, were not a major area of conflict and were easily adopted by the Yard. What really concerned the ropemakers were earnings and conditions.

- (1) NMM POR/F/24 2.1.1801
- (2) NMM POR/F/24 3.1.1801
- (3) NMM POR/A/44 10.12.1800

In particular they were eager to obtain the same treatment as artificers and labourers in other yards and crafts. Overtime and duties outside their normal responsibilities only became issues when they could serve as a means of asking for higher rates of pay. The Navy Board was able to avoid opposition to new machinery by establishing an altered wage scheme. (1) None-the-less, the ropemakers were the most strike-prone group in the Yard and this may be related to the fact that like the millwrights, who also had a short history of militancy, they were apparently associated with a civilian trade organisation. (2) In contrast, the shipwrights, though also militant, handled their disputes without any stoppages and without any formal links with civilian workers.

The Shipwrights

The shipwrights, being far more numerous and employed in a wider range of jobs than the ropemakers, were concerned over a wider variety of issues, though disputes over earnings were important.

In October 1793 the shipwrights working in the boathouse complained that their earnings were low because they worked shorter hours than those in the masthouse. They also added the more general demand that the docking of ships should be done by job. Despite their protestations of the "strongest sentiments of loyalty and gratitude to the Government which we serve with zeal and ardour", only the latter point was obtained. (3) The next incident was minor, but revealing. In order to sanitise a ship, full of French prisoners of war and their families, some shipwrights were ordered to cut scuttles in the vessel's side. The Commissioner had to report "...the gang

(1) See above p. 217

(2) See below p. 367

(3) NMM POR/A/ 21.10.1793

of shipwrights with their Quartermen, absolutely refuse to go down and cut them not being able to endure the intolerable stench." Saxton admitted that the condition of the prisoners was bad : "Being all French - with their habits of long living in filth and nastiness." Assured by the Yard Surgeon that there was nothing "epidemical or contagious". Saxton persuaded the men to return to work by shaming them out of their fears. He was still worried that any rumour of "infection and contagion" might bring the Yard to a stop, but the incident had no repercussions. (1)

Two events of an ominously different nature took place in December, 1794. First, an inflammatory notice was stuck up in the Yard. Second, a demonstration took place among a gang of shipwrights on board a ship when some mutineers were brought on deck. Of the first incident Saxton said : "We are apt to charge it upon some of the Eastern Gangs sent here to work, and I believe from some refractory disposition that has manufactured itself in particular among the Deptford Gang." (2)

Confirmation of the Thames men's dissatisfaction came in February of the next year when three gangs from Deptford petitioned to be allowed to return home. This request was refused but the away-allowance was raised from sixpence to a shilling.(3) Still, the Deptford men preferred their own Yard and three months later they were joined by the shipwrights from Woolwich in requesting to be allowed to return to the river. After making enquiries of the Yard Officers the Navy Board decided that they could now go, as they were no longer needed. (4)

(1) NMM POR/F/21 3.4.1794

(2) NMM POR/F/21 13.12.1794. These mutineers may have been from the Culloden which was in a state of mutiny from 3rd December to the 11th, 1794. W.L.C. Lowe The Royal Navy and History 6 (1894) p.340

(3) NMM POR/A/38 2.2.1795

(4) NMM POR/A/38 3.4.1795
NMM POR/A/38 8.4.1795

Petitions of this sort were frequent whenever workers had to be drafted to Portsmouth from other Yards. Obviously the men did not like being separated from their families and objected to the expense of bringing them with them or of keeping two homes. (1) These visiting workers were a disturbing influence in the Yard. In 1800 after some trouble Saxton wrote :

"... I was sorry to feel myself impelled to take notice that most of the disturbances that had occurred in this Yard since my being Commissioner had originated with some or other of the People from the Eastern Yards - and that it was generally so considered." (2)

The Commissioner may, of course, have been trying to put as favourable a light as possible on his own administration and cast some of the blame for the incident on the Commissioners of the other Yards.

In 1795, however, the visiting shipwrights were not the only dissatisfied workmen in the Yard. The situation may have been made worse by an order which stopped the practice of paying the shipwrights in the Mast- Boat- and Tophouses for overtime that they did not in fact work. Even so, it was another warrant that caused general strife. (3) To relieve an ever increasing pressure of work, the Navy Board directed that the Yard's house carpenters and joiners were to build the storerooms on board of vessels instead of shipwrights, thus leaving the latter free for more skilled work. If necessary extra carpenters were to be recruited (4). The trouble began in early February when the shipwrights remonstrated with the Master Shipwright about this dilution and the invasion of what they considered to be the rightful boundary between their work and that of other occupational groups. In addition they were also concerned

(1) NMM POR/A/38 8.6.1796. Caulkers from Deptford complained that they had: "Families in want of them at Home and their being improvided with Necessaries."

(2) NMM POR/F/24 24.7.1800

(3) NMM POR/A/38 22.2.1794

(4) NMM POR/A/38 31.2.1795

about conditions in the Mast and Top houses. Then came a petition and a meeting between the Resident Commissioner and "...six or seven of the Principal shipwrights deputed by the rest ..." Saxton did not like the tone of the petition. "I thought they had most unreasonably and injudiciously thrown a string of grievances that had nothing to do with the present matter in question." He told the delegates that if they would continue work temporarily he would suspend the order for employing the house carpenters. He noted in his report to the Board that : "...an essay of this sort, (i.e. the employment of carpenters afloat), was made in October 1787 - but could not be effected, therefore it were to be wished that any other time than the present had been chosen for the experiment." Half-an-hour after writing this, at six o'clock, Saxton added a post-script to his letter. "The Deputed Shipwrights have sent word that they can give no immediate decision as the gangs have not returned from Spithead but they agree to go to work as usual tomorrow and reconsider their petition." (1)

Next day Saxton posted two petitions to the Board. "The second is what they call an amended one and is in my opinion still more offensive than the first." He thought :

"They must have some powerful instigators otherwise they would have felt in some little degree, all that has been urged and said to soothen (sic) and soften them as far as was prudent - but they seem as if they would not be satisfied with a little and have consented to wait till Tuesday's Post for the Boards final answer." (2)

Saxton's implied criticism of the Board's timing in introducing the house carpenters afloat was ignored. The Administration were faced with a deteriorating military situation in Holland and one of

(1) NMM 60/F/21 5.2.1795

(2) NMM 60/F/21 6.2.1795

rare instances when the French Fleet was actually at sea. Faced with a very serious threat to its authority the Navy Board was disposed to take a strong line with their employees and one of the Commissioners in London, Sir John Henslow, was sent to Portsmouth to help Saxton in negotiations.

Immediately on arriving, Sir John met the Shipwright deputation and, after a long discussion, agreement was reached. The shipwrights conceded the point about the carpenters provided that the various gangs working on the ships' sides in houses ashore and on jobs were rotated so as to even out their pay. (1) Perhaps the rapid despatch of a Commissioner from London overawed the deputation; for Henslow and Saxton reported to the Board :

"We are not a little satisfied that this seemingly very serious interruption to the Public service is likely to go off so very mildly - and so very contrary to what it threatened at first. As their Deportment and behaviour in this interview were so exceedingly wide of their conduct and Demeanour in the two Different interviews held with them Yesterday. Nor is it easy to guess to what cause it can be attributed. Unless they have been talked to pretty firmly, which we hope the Board will approve."(2)

Unaware of these developments the Navy Board were preparing for the worst. Saxton was instructed to tell the men that the innovation was copied from the merchant yards (this was apparently an outright lie); that the Admiralty had been informed (in fact they were told of the affair only after it was settled); and that a third Commissioner of the Navy, Sir William Rule, was coming to Portsmouth so that a Committee of the Navy Board could be formed there. (3)

- (1) NMM66/A/21 7.2.1795
- (2) NMM66/A/21 7.2.1795
- (3) PRO ADM.106 2653 10.2.1795

"We desire you to make known to them the high displeasure we entertain for their present conduct and represent to them how ill it becomes a Body of Men like them who are receiving such great advantage from their present employment, and who on all occasions are the object of care and protection of the Public Boards, to raise difficulties on the present urgent occasion a disposition to hinder the exertions making by the Country at large to meet the accumulated Enemies she is now threatened with." (1)

These orders were prescient because the two Commissioners in Portsmouth had made a serious misjudgment. The mass of shipwrights refused to accept the settlement.

"Yesterday the deputies assured us that they could satisfy the body of the People that their demands had been met. But this morning either from a capricious and wayward turn of disposition - or from hidden incendiaries they returned us a resolution in writing that the Body would not come into the terms proposed nor relinquish any point whatever." (sic) (2)

Joined now by Sir William Rule, yet another meeting took place between the "Principals" of the shipwrights and the Navy's negotiators. After an hour the deputation went back to their constituents expecting them to accept a new settlement. In the afternoon they returned with a verbal answer to the same effect as their earlier written one :

"...our concern was so great and our astonishment such that after setting forth the unworthy manner in which they had trifled and treated us - and restating all our intreaties and wishes by every new Argument and Representation that suggested its self to us the Evil that must publicly and privately flow from their invincible obstinacy we judged it indispensably necessary to read to them the final instructions brought from the Board by Sir Wm. Rule and feel ourselves reduced to carry the Board's orders into instant effect." (sic) (3)

The deputation left, apparently much impressed, promising a reply that evening; it would appear, this was another rejection; for next morning, at Call, the Clerk of the Cheque read the workmen the instructions sent from London and the warrant implementing them immediately. (4) Every man not answering his call and obeying

- (1) NMM POR/G/1 7.2.1795
- (2) NMM POR/F/21 8.2.1795
- (3) NMM POR/F/21 8.2.1795
- (4) NMM POR/F/21 9.2.1795

orders "unequivocably" was to be instantly discharged with all his gang. All present obeyed but forty-two men were absent.

"And in order to the real motive of their non-attendance and keeping back - we have judged it proper to order them to be discharged conformably to the Board's directions, as they must have been informed of the order by their comrades and Deputies and to leave such as them as solicit to be re-entered to make it appear to the Commissioner that no evil intention was meant by their holding back and keeping away that particular call.

The people are now at Bellringing $\frac{1}{2}$ past 5 going quietly and uniformly out of the Yard to their several homes." (1)

The Navy Board had even been prepared to discharge the entire workforce of shipwrights, old and infirm men included. A list of men dismissed was forwarded to the Capital so that the merchant builders could be informed of their names and refuse to employ them.(2) . These apparently draconian measures were off-set by concessions made in the same order. The shipwrights were to be allowed the points that had formed the original settlement as offered by Henslow and Saxton; it being "...expedient to give every encouragement to the workmen in His Majesty's several Yards at this time when all exertion is expected of them. (3) Even most of the men discharged were re-entered, though about a dozen were still excluded because it seemed that :

"...after a very minute investigation of the apparent motives for which they withheld themselves from Call appearing from circumstances in the course of Enquiry to be very suspicious and doubtfull."(4)

However, on the seventeenth Saxton reported :

"...upon application and constant entreaty I permitted their entry Yesterday - after remaining Discharged from the Yards Books an entire week - and I hope as they appear very thankful it will have its full effect." (5)

- (1) NMM POR/F/21 9.2.1795
- (2) NMM POR/G/1 9.2.1795
- (3) NMM POR/A/38 9.2.1795
- (4) NMM POR/F/21 10.2.1795
- (5) NMM POR/F/21 17.2.1795

The Navy Board won an important point, the right to direct labour as it wished, but the shipwrights had made some advances and all of their leaders remained in the Yard. The compromising attitude shown by the Board demonstrated that, in war-time, the Navy could not afford to lose any of its skilled labour, though the threat of dismissal was an effective bargaining counter. The desire of the Board to placate the shipwrights was shown next month when the men in the Boathouse petitioned to have job work in the same manner as their compatriots at Plymouth, protesting that "...their zeal is as ardent, that their love of their country is equally sincere and that their exertions are more frequently called for and as much complied with." (1) The request was granted. (2) Further, in April, a number of new apprenticeships were created. The relationship between apprentices and labour incentives has already been noted. (3) Another petition, from the Masthouse, was approved, and to "...prevent any repetition of the discontent that has lately prevailed among the shipwrights ...", it was ordered that the work that would be completed by the carpenters was to be started by the shipwrights at piece rates. (4)

The wisdom of the Board's conciliatory attitude was shown when the policy of using house carpenters afloat was extended to the other Yards. Protests took place at Plymouth and Chatham, where the military had to be called out to protect men trying to go to work. (5)

Saxton reported that there were eight "Emissaries", two from each of the Thames Yards, in Portsmouth, and that they were issuing handbills and arranging a "conference". However, the Commissioner thought that they had little influence on the local shipwrights and were only supported by the Eastern gangs in the Yard.

- (1) PRO ADM 106 26.3.1795 and NMM POR/A/38 27.3.1795
- (2) NMM POR/A/38 30.3.1795
- (3) NMM POR/A/38 2.3.1795
- (4) NMM POR/A/38 6.3.1795 and NMM POR/A/38 15.4.1795
- (5) NMM POR/A/38 9.3.1795, 25.3.1795, 10.4.1795

"Your indulgence for servants to such as deserve that encouragement appears to have arrived very opportunely." (1)
Saxton told the Board.

The Thames dissidents were discharged and this time the Board refused to re-enter them. The policy formulated at Portsmouth was used against the Deptford shipwrights in 1796, when they refused to allow house carpenters to work afloat. The impression that the Board was pursuing a calculated policy is strengthened by the fact that a copy of the correspondence relating to the initial dispute in Portsmouth was sent to all the other Yards. (2)

A second illustration of how wise the Board had been not to alienate the Portsmouth shipwrights came a few weeks after the dispute, when a serious food riot took place. The Yard workers not only stood aloof but the shipwrights helped restore the peace. (3) One of the most interesting aspects of the affair was that it also disturbed men working in the merchant yards, leading to one of several instances of action in support of each other by the civilian and Government shipwrights. (4) Over six-hundred shipwrights employed on the Thames put their names to a petition taken to the Admiralty by two delegates. They stated their opposition to, "...the practice of introducing persons upon the trade who have no right to Title to it. Also they claimed that the house carpenters would be eventually dismissed and would find their way into the merchant yards where, with the example of the Admiralty before them, the Master Ship-builders would use the carpenters to do shipwrights' work. This would seem to give the lie to the Navy Board's claim

(1) PRO ADM 106 1867 3.4.1795 and PRO ADM 106 1867 2.4.1795

(2) NMM ADM BP. 16a 9.1.1796 and PRO ADM 106 1867 8.2.1795

(3) See below p. 513

(4) See below p. 355

that the practice of using carpenters afloat had been copied from the civilian firms, unless it was in some obscure out-port yard.

The arguments that the Thames men used in support of their petition are interesting for the strong proprietary sentiments they contain and the mixture of veiled threat and promise. In typically eighteenth century language, they complained that the Navy action would be :

"To deprive a usefull sett of men of their Rights which we value as our lives and is to us as our Estates, is contrary to the Laws of the Country, Repugnant to all good order and Immediately to introduce a levelling system."

The men warned that they might eventually be forced into "...seeking refuge where we may Injoy our Rights which by the Authority of the Navy Board we are denied." To avoid this crisis they said that they were willing to serve in the Dock Yards during emergencies. (1) It is difficult to judge to what degree their stated sentiments coincided with the shipwrights' real opinions. Their petition could be carefully worded in language which was thought most likely to appeal to the lords and gentlemen who administered the Navy; yet the memorial also demonstrates the strength and organisation of the Thames' workmen.

From 1795 to 1801 the shipwrights made no open protest about wages and conditions. Tension was growing, however, and two serious incidents of another nature took place. The first of these episodes is of particular interest because John Gast, later to become a leading trade unionist in London, was involved. Gast described his part in the affair to the Parliamentary Committee on the Combination Laws of 1825. (2)

(1) PRO ADM/1/5125 1795

(2) PP.1825 (417) IV p.298 Committee on the Combination Laws

After serving his apprenticeship in a merchant yard in Bristol, Gast had entered Portsmouth Dock Yard in January 1797. Apparently, he was already capable of attracting the attention and holding the confidence of his fellow workmen for when a dispute with the Yard management broke out in April, he was chosen by his company to be a representative at a meeting of delegates from all the shipwrights' gangs. (1) The cause of contention was that a Quartermaster had exchanged blows with a shipwright. Boddy, the officer concerned, claimed that Read, the shipwright, had struck him because he had reprimanded Read for being away from his duty. Read had already been threatened with dismissal when Boddy had reported him to the Master Shipwright for a similar offence. (2) However, as Saxton complained, "...no one saw the man strike the officer but they all saw the officer push the man over the log." (3)

At breakfast^{time} the Master Shipwright found his door surrounded by angry workmen who demanded that Boddy be put out of the Yard. He reprobated them for their behaviour, but said that he would talk to a deputation. When Boddy was sent for, the shipwrights insisted on accompanying him to the Master Shipwrights' office and kept up their demands that they be allowed to turn him out. The Master Shipwright gave way but ensured that no harm was done to Boddy by sending two Yard Officers with him as far as the gate. There, the assembled workmen gave three cheers and returned to their jobs. Left to themselves the shipwrights would probably have been more

- (1) Gast may have gained experience as an industrial organiser in Bristol, where a serious shipwrights' strike disrupted the port in 1794. See C.N. Parkinson The Trade Winds (1948) p.70
- (2) ADM/BP 17a 27.4.1797
- (3) NMM POR/F/22 27.4.1797

vigorous in their treatment of Boddy, subjecting him to the custom of "horsing". (1)

After Boddy's expulsion Commissioner Saxton had a long interview with eight or ten shipwrights about the affair. He thought that he had persuaded them to agree to Boddy remaining in the Yard if Read was not discharged. However, the rest of the shipwrights, "...insisted that the Quartermaster Mr. Boddy should quit the Yard or that they would one and all." Saxton regretted to see "...such a close imitation of the spirit and conduct of the Seamen afloat." (2) It should be remembered that these events were taking place in the midst of the alarm created by the Spithead mutiny and that one of the most striking features of the mutiny was that the sailors put ashore unpopular officers demanding their permanent removal. Saxton reported a few days later that all was quiet, "...yet I am not without some apprehension that Mr. Boddy is to be made a pretext for further evil intentions ...". He reminded the Board that there were gangs from Woolwich and Deptford whom he regarded as trouble-makers in the Yard. Even so, on the advice of the Yard Officers the Commissioner did not take any further action, though he had the Board's permission to dismiss Boddy if it proved necessary. (3)

Next, the shipwrights sent three delegates with "a sort of petition", the purport of which was given in a letter :

- (1) Horsing was described in 1741 when it was used against a man who did not have proper indentures. "The shipwrights surrounded him, put a piece of Quarter between his leggs, took him up on their shoulders, carried him just without the Gate then sat him down gave three Cheers and returned to their duties" (D. Baugh op. cit. p.317) This custom was still known at the end of the eighteenth century; see below p.
- (2) NMM POR/F/22 27.4.1797
- (3) NMM POR/F/22 28.4.1797

"To the master Shipwrights and Superior Officers,

"Gentlemen Evere Minefull off that due Subordination to Yo as Superior Officers allways willing to Perform our duty as a Body of Meckanicks, from which you have had Repeated testimones, of our Willingness to do, But knowing likewise our Worth as men cannot put up with the Tyriney of our inferior Officers when it is not Santioned by our Superior officer

Gentlemen, You are well acquainted with the tyriney off a Late Officer who by is Repeated insults Ocationed the Late troubles in the yard which Could not longer be put up with, but as Men ever Mineful off keeping the peace and knowing our duty to our King & Country, whe have come to the Resolution of sending a petition to the Navy Board & to the Admiralty for the dismissal of Mr. Body with the repeated insults stated inful likewise the Number against his being Reenterd

Gentlemen whe thought it our Duty to inform you of our proceeding fully determined that if Mr. Body is not dismiss Nothing shall impead our petition.

From Your humble
servants the Shipwrights. (1)

The humility of the shipwrights may not be very clear from this document but their feelings about Boddy were. Saxton immediately implemented the order for his discharge, "...in order to manifest (the) ...disapprobation of any violence being used by the Officers towards the People working under them." (2) In the deputation that went to see the Commissioner was Gast whose later recollection of it was not quite correct.

Protesting his youth and inexperience, Gast had agreed to go to a meeting of all the delegates from the shipwrights if he was accompanied by an older man. His fellow delegate, one Dukes, introduced Gast to the Meeting.

"I got up and stated the case to them, rather different from the general mode of stating which they had been accustomed to. The result was they absolutely removed the chairman from the chair, and appointed me as chairman for that evening."

The man forced to vacate the chair was named Fabian. Gast said

- (1) PRO/ADM/106/1868 28.4.1797
- (2) NMM POR/G/24 28.4.1797. Boddy was not abandoned. His wife was given some canvas to cover a waggon in which she was going to Northamptonshire and a reference of 1800 mentions Boddy as converting timber for the Navy in Northamptonshire. He also had the benefit of an apprentice. NMM POR/C/24 4.7.1797 and NMM POR/A/43 18.9.1800.

that he and another man, Mawley as it is spelt in the Parliamentary Papers, were sent to take the shipwrights' grievances to the Resident Commissioner. In his report of the interview Saxton said that three men had come to see him : John Gast, George Morley and Edward Fabian, who alone of the three men had served his apprenticeship in the Yard. It is interesting that the man Gast forgot was at the meeting was probably the person he had replaced as chairman. These names are worth bearing in mind when more general consideration is given to the nature of the shipwrights' organisations.

Gast claimed that he was victimised for his part in this dispute, though he rejected a suggestion that he had operated as an agitator. The Navy Board ordered that every shipwright who had been entered in the Yard since the beginning of the year (1796) was to be discharged. In all, twenty-five to twenty-seven men were affected, including Gast, but none of the other leaders. Such an order was certainly made, though men who had been trained in the Yard were excepted. In addition, the Board forbade the further entry of any more shipwrights; apart from those who finished their training in Portsmouth.(1) Gast may, therefore, have jumped to the wrong conclusion, at any rate he seems to have received little support from the other shipwrights, though the discharged men did appoint Gast as a delegate to see Saxton on their behalf about the payment of their wages. (2) It was remarks made by the Commissioner that convinced Gast he was being victimised. He asked Saxton why he was being discharged, "Sir Charles Saxton, I shall ever recollect it, says "'Young man you know too much for a shipwright.'" It must be emphasised that there is nothing in the Dock Yard records to suggest that Gast had been singled out for special treatment; for instance, he was not black-listed

(1) NMM POR/A/40 22.5.1797

(2) Portsmouth Gazette 29.5.1795

though the Navy Board did use this practice. One feels, however, that perhaps both Dock Yard Officers and the older shipwrights were not sad to see the last of this brilliant young radical.

Obviously the whole Boddy incident had struck a very sensitive nerve among the shipwrights and the Navy Board recognised this. It is noteworthy that a few weeks later the Admiralty acceded to the seamen's demands and one hundred and fourteen officers were removed from their ships in the fleet at Spithead. (1) However, as we will later describe, there appears to have been no link between the Dock Yard workers and the mutineers. Neither the events afloat or the excitement over Boddy had any repercussions. Even a meeting called to consider higher peace-time wages failed, for some unknown reason, to materialise. (2)

Though the incidents that took place in relation to the criminal activities of the Yard Employees are covered in another context, there was one affair that can be dealt with here as it blew up into a more general issue. When a warder apprehended a boy hidden in a cart, a shipwright intervened with the butt end of his adze. He was prevented from doing any violence by a quartermaster. Tempers were lost and some other men joined in, shouting, "Let him alone you D.....d B....., etc." The Commissioner spent several hours in two hearings sorting out what had happened: he finally dismissed the man who tried to strike the blow. Further, he recommended to the Navy Board, that the Workmen from Woolwich, Deptford and Chatham should be withdrawn to their own Yards. His advice proved well-founded for a few days later "...a large body of shipwrights" assembled before his door "...to remonstrate against the proceeding and in rather a rude

(1) J. Dugan The Great Mutiny (1965) p.170

(2) ADM/1/4172 22.5.1797 PG 29.5.1797

and indecent manner." Saxton, hard pressed, threatened to send for the military. "They answered do! do!", and called out that the discharged man had not been given a fair hearing. The Commissioner tried, through an emissary to tell the protestors that he had made very careful enquiries; yet he had to agree to another hearing with the man present. As no new evidence was forthcoming, Saxton upheld his original order. Addressing the shipwrights, he blamed the affair on those from the Eastern Yards and the men dispersed quietly. Next day, all was calm and Saxton said: "I understand our people have avowed their dissatisfaction at having taken part with the Eastern people upon the late occasion and are very quiet." (1)

So far, the issues that have been considered as concerning shipwrights have, in part, been similar to those which affected the ropemakers; overtime payments and parity of pay within the Yard and between Yards; but the shipwrights were also anxious about the demarcation between crafts and even more worried about matters affecting their dignity. These concerns probably reflect the shipwrights' status as craftsmen. No real wage dispute took place until the 1800's and then it involved all occupational groups in the Yard.

1801

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the labour dispute of May and April¹⁸⁰¹ was the civil counterpart of the mutinies of 1797; contemporaries referred to it as "A Great Rebellion" and a "most dangerous mutiny". (2) These terms reflect something of the hysteria that the event seems to have aroused in official quarters. Two

- (1) NMM POR/F/24 22.7.1800
NMM POR/A/43 22.6.1800
NMM POR/F/24 24.7.1800

- (2) Jeffrey. A Key to the Papers, which have been presented to the House of Commons upon the subject of the Charges against the Earl of St. Vincent. (London 1806)

factors may account for this panic; the first is chronological. Early 1801 was a critical time in the British war effort. Barred from the Baltic by the League of Armed Neutrality, she was cut off from her all important naval supplies. A dispute in the Yards might appear to be treachery of the lowest kind at a time when every effort was being made to fit out a fleet, fourteen ships brought out of Ordinary and fourteen transferred from the Channel Fleet to use against the Northern Powers. The other factor was the appointment, in February 1801, of John Jarvis, Earl St. Vincent as First Lord of the Admiralty. A man of great tenacity and firm convictions, if not bloody-mindedness, Jarvis had very fixed ideas about naval administration. He saw the system as corrupt to the very root and he was determined to purge it. (1) To say the least, it was unfortunate that St. Vincent was in office during this dispute, for he was apt to forget that his desk was not upon the Quarter Deck of a man-of-war.

In February 1801 the Dock Yards presented a joint petition, but the first disruption of work did not occur until late March (2) when delegates from the various Yards were already in London. As the Baltic Fleet sailed from its rendezvous off Yarmouth on 12th March, it is clear that if the Yard workmen had intended to use ruthless strategy to delay the sailing of the fleet, they had left it rather late, even if time is allowed for the vessels to assemble. It is much more reasonable to suppose that the men were motivated by the latest rise in prices and the intensification of labour required hastily to fit out the ships. Plymouth was the location

- (1) D. Bonham Smith Letters of Lord St. Vincent Navy Records Society
Vols. LVI and LXI
- (2) PRO ADM/2/628 25.2.1801
PRO HO/28/27 31.3.1801

led

of the first strike. It resulted from the arrest of a Yard sawyer for taking part in a food riot. The resulting confusion in the minds of the authorities of trade union issues with protests over high food prices must have embarrassed the delegates assembled in London to negotiate with them. (1) It probably alarmed the authorities who may have seen the Yard delegates' petition as being backed by the threat of violence. The Navy Board warned the Commissioners resident in the Dock Yards : "...although there appears no combination with the other dockyards there have been sensations in them which would soon blaze forth, if any strong measure was taken at Plymouth."

Chatham was also subject to unrest over prices; an inflammatory notice comparing earnings and prices over the past decade was stuck up on the Yard wall. (2) Food rioting was, at this time, reaching epidemic proportions all over the country but such events had happened before and the Dock Yards, with society in general, had survived. In Portsmouth minor disturbances had taken place the year before and clashes in 1795 had ended to the credit of the Yard and shipwrights, so that in themselves, there was nothing about these events that should have unduly worried the naval authorities. (3)

In London the delegates were staying at the Angel Inn St. Clements. After persistently requesting a reply to their petitions they had an interview with the Navy Board on the 1st April. (4) Eventually the Board decided that, considering the workers' earnings, they were not able to offer a permanent increase in wages. However, in view of the current high prices they were willing to pay all married men without apprentices a special allowance related to the

- (1) PRO HO/28/27 31.3.1801
PRO ADM/106/2227 1.4.1801
PRO ADM/106/2227 13.4.1801
- (2) PRO HO/38 27 9.4.1801
- (3) See below p. 513
- (4) PRO ADM 106/2227 13.4.1801

size of their families.(1) The delegates accepted the offer as fair but there were hidden suspicions on both sides. The Board ordered the men to return to their own Yards on pain of dismissal. Giving expression to the authorities' doubts St.

Vincent wrote :

"I have more than a suspicion to induce a belief that the shipwrights' officers in all the dockyards have tacitly encouraged the artificers in their late attempt to extort an increase of permanent wages; and that when the persons who were deputed as delegates applied for leave of absence the above mentioned officers were well acquainted with their mission." (2)

In view of his bias the First Lord's statement has to be carefully considered. In organising a joint petitioning campaign, the Yard workers were doing nothing that had not been done before. Their direct approach was unusual but not unique; the shipwrights had sent similar delegations to Town in 1765 and in 1769; then, as now, committees had been set up in each Yard to conduct the dispute. (3) In 1801, however, the membership of these committees was not restricted to shipwrights. On Portsmouth's committee there were : eight shipwrights, four ropmakers, three caulkers, two house carpenters, and the same number of joiners, sawyers, bricklayers, labourers, riggers, sailmakers, scavellmen and storehouse labourers. The masons and smiths provided one member each. (4) If this arrangement was paralleled throughout all of the Yards it must have

(1) PRO ADM 106/2227 1.4.1801

NMM ADM BP 21a 1.4.1801

NMM POR/G/1 15.4.1801

Besides bringing to mind the Speenhamland system, this family allowance against high prices is paralleled by a sliding wage fixed by JP's in Scotland during the food crises of 1795-6 and 1799-1800, and a price-related wage agreement between shipwrights and their masters in Leith. See C. Burns The Origins of the Labour Movement in Scotland (Strathclyde UN MSc. Thesis 1971) p.88. J.S. Marshall Leith in the Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh University Ph.D. Thesis 1969) pp.208-210.

(2) E.P. Bræton Life and Correspondence of John Earl St. Vincent (London 1838) p.64.

(3) W. Shrubsole op.cit. J.M. Haas op.cit.

(4) NMM POR/A/44 16.5.1801

appeared a very formidable demonstration of unity. The confidence of these committees is shown by the fact that the handbills they issued were signed. (1)

The delegation sent to London consisted of two representatives from each Yard : Plymouth, Portsmouth, Chatham, Sheerness and Woolwich and Deptford. Besides lobbying the Admiralty they petitioned the House of Commons about rising prices, rents and interest rates, relying on the "Justice and Humanity of Parliament" for redress. They also wrote to the Prime Minister and the First Secretary of the Admiralty, Evan Nepean. (2) Just how able the Dock Yard leaders were is illustrated by a legal opinion given by the government law officers on the petitions that they presented. This also reveals something of the attitude of the authorities; for they were responding to a Home Office inquiry asking whether any of the delegates were liable to prosecution for their activities. In their reply the Attorney and Solicitor General were to the point: the delegates were only subject to charges if the subscribers to the petition were: "...if it be no crime in the petitioners to petition neither is it any crime in their delegates to present their petitions ..." Right of laying grievances before the Crown and Government was one of the few civil liberties left at this date. The law officers continued :

"With respect to the Petitions themselves, considering the number of persons subscribing them, the number of Petitions, the time and circumstances under which they were presented and the language in which they were couched, we are of the opinion that any Judge would be disposed to leave such petitions to a Jury as strong evidence from which they might infer the Crime of Conspiracy in the Petitioners for the purposes of obtaining an increase in wages by intimidation. It is to be observed, however, that the Petitioners cautiously avoid any particular expression of intimidation, or any intimation of an intention to strike work or to resort to any other compulsory means to obtain their objects, and therefore we think that though such intention might properly

(1) E.P. Buxton op.cit. p.168

(2) PRO ADM/1/5126 12.4.1801

be inferred from the Circumstances above alluded to, yet that it is very doubtful whether such inference would be drawn by the Jury, and as it would be highly inexpedient to bring forward any such case for trial without a great certainty of succeeding we can not recommend under present circumstances that any proceedings should be instituted."

However, if a strike did take place then the petitions could be used as very good evidence of conspiracy. (1) To conduct a labour dispute at this date without falling foul of all the existing paraphernalia of repressive legislation was a considerable achievement and an act of personal bravery on the part of the delegates; for it must be borne in mind that from January 1801 Habeas Corpus had been suspended once more.

In the light of all this, St. Vincent's suspicions were, perhaps, understandable if not justified. As far as his criticism of the dockyard officers goes it should be said that in granting leave of absence, if in fact they did so, they were well within their rights. It is fair to ask what else the yard authorities were to do; were they by refusing permission for the men to go to London, to turn a legitimate and reasonable request presented in a legal and well-ordered manner into an immediate confrontation? The times were desperate; were the yard workers to be turned down out of hand? What the First Lord seems to be implying is that the workers were so well organised that some outside element had to be directing them. The evidence already considered is enough to show that at least two groups in the Dock Yard were veterans in industrial conflict and it will be shown later than other groups did not lack in militancy. As a whole the Dock Yard workforce was capable of sophisticated self organisation; so that it must be concluded that the labourers and artisans of the yards were capable of conducting the whole of this dispute themselves.

On their part, the delegates, returning to their yards, found that the settlement offered by the Navy Board was not acceptable to the mass of the workers. An anonymous letter from Portsmouth provides very interesting information on the situation there, and on the way that the strike was conducted. The writer claimed that the Navy Boards offer was accepted "With gratitude by upward of 2,274", but the committee was pressured by three men who came from the east (that is the Yards on the Thames and its estuary) to criticise the Portsmouth decision. They persuaded the committee to instruct the London delegates that there was a majority of 300 for rejecting the offer. The writer did not deny that there was a majority against the settlement; but complained that, "...out of the number that there is against it there is four Hundred labourers and Green Countrymen who know not what they want." The minority contained the workers in the boat and masthouses and most of those on the dockside; these were, of course, shipwrights. The implication that the attitude of the skilled men was more important than that of the labourers is quite clear, but this letter appears to have been the only deviation from the impressive unity shown by the workers; for presumably the other shipwrights were willing to abide by the decision of the majority. The "scab", who informed on his fellow workers, apologised for his anonymity saying that, "...were my name known to my Opposers my life would be in danger." He signed himself "A Friend of Peace". (1)

Thus it was that, after an absence of five days, the Yard delegates were back in London and the Navy Board informed the various Resident Commissioners :

(1) PRO HO 28/27 p.88 13.4.1801

"Where as several Artificers, Labourers and others belonging to His Majestys Dock and Rope Yards are at this time in London with a view to getting their wages raised notwithstanding the Liberal Condescension of Government to their petitions still continue to absent themselves from their duty. We direct you to send us immediately the Names of the men who are absent from your Yard and their qualities, how long absent, with leave or without." (1)

The delegates were unable to obtain any great advance on the Board's last offer but a wage review was pledged when peace returned. "The men thereupon appeared satisfied and promised to return to their duty immediately." The Admiralty, however, was not going to leave the issue there.

"The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty having taken into full consideration various letters and Papers received from his Grace the Duke of Portland, which clearly demonstrate that the Dockyards, particularly at Plymouth, are in a great state of disorder and that proceedings of a very dangerous tendency have been suffered to take place without an efficient means being taken to suppress them. And it having there fore been judged expedient that a Committee of this Board should proceed to Plymouth and institute an Enquiry into all the Circumstances relative to the rise and Progress of these Disorders.

We acquaint you that the Deputy Comptroller, the Second Surveyor and Commissioner Hartwell have accordingly set out to Plymouth and are now about to set out from thence for Portsmouth for the like purposes.

We therefore desire you will join the said committee and furnish them with every information in your power and act in conjunction with them according to the instructions they are furnished with, which they will communicate to you." (2)

Before leaving for Portsmouth the committee sent a warning to the Resident Commissioner there :

"We have just now received a Note from the Lord Lieutenant informing us that he had received intelligence of the Committeemen, discharged from this Yard, having written to the Committeemen of your Yard, acquainting them of what had happened here. Particulars of the letter are not known, but they require an answer by return of post. We give you this information that you might act as you think proper - but it might be useful if you could put it into circulation that the People here are all quiet

(1) NMM POR/A/44 13.4.1801

(2) NMM POR/G/1 7.5.1801

at their work, ashamed of their late conduct and holding in abhorrence those who had led them astray." (1)

Both these letters show how seriously the Government was alarmed. The interception of mail continued. An emissary from Sheerness was seen in Plymouth where a subscription was taken up for his support. (2) In fact, Plymouth seems to have been the most radical of the Yards, though a serious riot also took place in Sheerness.

The Home Office papers for this year contain a considerable amount of correspondence about the situation in Plymouth. It is clear that the Home Office thought that the magistracy there were very much to blame for the troubled situation. The Secretary of State, the Duke of Portland, wrote :

"I can not but be of the opinion that the Disturbances which have prevailed at Plymouth and which as you inform me still continue to threaten it, might have been entirely prevented and certainly never would have risen to the alarming height they have attained had the first instigators of them been resisted with Promptness and Decision and subjected to cognizance of the law." (3)

The Justices' claim that they could not answer for the peace of the district, even though a large military force was available, was contrasted with the firm action of Aaron Graham, the magistrate at Sheerness, who had called out the militia. The Home Office emphasised that if the situation warranted it there was no need to read the Riot Act; for if this were done an hour had, by law, to pass before the military could be brought into action. In the face of the local Justices' weakness, the Home Office put great reliance on the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, Earl Fortescue. He was requested to give special attention to Plymouth Dock Yard so that "a System of Subordination" could be

(1) NMM POR/F/1 8.5.1801

(2) E.P. Brenton op.cit.

(3) POR HO 43/12 14.4.1801

re-established. The Home Office pointed out the benefit of "...the General Effect of the Bringing of the Dockmen to a Sense of their Duty would have throughout the Kingdom." (1)

Some of the more disturbing incidents of this affair, as far as the authorities were concerned, included the raising of a Liberty Tree on board a vessel being repaired and a warning that the Dock Yard workers intended to seize the arms held in the Dock Yard for the use of the Watch. Colonel Bastard, the commander of the military at Plymouth, lodged the guns with the military guard removing the locks and bayonets. (2)

In comparison with other areas, Portsmouth was very calm.

The Navy Board Committee, when it reached there, reported that :

"From the information received from Sir Charles the Board had no reason to apprehend that there was any deep design under feigned pretences of sewing dissatisfaction among the people of this yard."

The men on the corresponding committee, had "...conducted themselves peacefully and perfectly to the satisfaction of their officers.":

"...as the yard is at present in a perfect state of subordination and the work proceeding in a proper manner, it might be prudent to let it continue so, and make a distinction between this and Plymouth yard where the aggression has been so much greater."

They therefore deferred discharging the committeemen, awaiting further instructions from the Navy Board. (3) Next day they used the Naval Telegraph between Portsmouth and the Capital to convey information about an interview between themselves and Portsmouth's chief magistrate.

"Sir John Carter, the Mayor of Portsmouth, having called on the Board and represented to them the orderly and meritorious behaviour of the workmen belonging to this yard at a time when such bad examples had been set them by other yards, and by whom great pains had been taken to induce them to act in a like manner and stated that they are a body of men on whom

- (1) PRO HO 43/12 1.5.1801
- PRO HO 43/12 20.4.1801
- PRO HO 43/12 23.4.1801

(2) E.P. Bratton op.cit.p. 80 PRO ADM 106/2228 1.6.1801

(3) NMM ADM/BP 219 13.5.1801

he can at all times depend for supporting the Civil Power." (1)

The central administration, however, were determined to pursue a firm policy. On the 15th of May copies of the Riot Act were put up in the Yard and on the 16th orders were given for the dismissal of 39 men for being committee members, though only 35 names are given, one of those missing being that of a London delegate. It was reported, on the 18th, that the men had taken their things away in an orderly manner. (2)

Immediately the Yard was trying to fill the vacancies created by the dismissals and by the latest means of protest adopted by the workers, which was to discharge themselves. The rules governing entry into the Yards were temporarily lifted, allowing those who left of their own free will to re-enter. (3)

Later a more trenchant attitude was taken; the Navy Board ordered that a close investigation be made when any man wished to leave the yard. A secret order was sent for the impressment of any artificer of the Dock or Rope Yards who left voluntarily. (4)

Even so, in September, because of: "The great number of Artificers and labourers who have left the Dockyard at Portsmouth ..." extra labour had to be recruited." (5) The merchant shipyards created a constant demand for workmen during time of war. The Admiralty appears to have failed to inform the private builders of the names of the recalcitrants who had been dismissed or had left the Royal Yards.

(1) NMM ADM/BP 219 14.5.1801

(2) NMM POR/F/24 15.5.1801

NMM POR/A/44 16.5.1801

NMM POR/F/24 18.5.1801

(3) NMM POR/A/44 18.5.1801

NMM POR/A/44 5.6.1801

(4) NMM POR/G/11 27.7.1801

(5) NMM POR/F/11 1.9.1801

A number of workmen also left Plymouth and Woolwich. St. Vincent wrote :

"...I am by no means concerned at the discontented shipwrights of Plymouth Yard having quitted it. Some of them have attempted to get to America in a vessel from the Thames, and endeavours have in vain been used to lay hold of them. Should they reach that Country, they will very soon repent their migration." (1)

The Woolwich men also escaped to America with their families, though only with the connivance or through the inefficiency of the customs' officers who had detained the American vessel they were on in the Thames. (2)

It is interesting to consider the great dispute of 1801 in connection with the Combination Acts which had been passed in the two preceding years. Much has been written on the nature and effectiveness of these weapons against the Trade Unions; the general concensus appears to be that over all they made little impression on the growth of working class organisations. (3)

One recent commentator has written :

"Was this legislation," as the Webbs call it, "a new and momentous departure? The researches of Dorothy George, subsequently supported by those of Aspinall, have shown convincingly that it was not; that in fact it "represented no change in policy" that it "merely added one more to the many existing statutes". True, it was general instead of particular legislation, but it contained no new principle, nor was it distinguished from earlier laws by its severity - in fact the penalties were considerably lighter than those which could be imposed under common law prosecutions ... Thus the 1800 Act "was in practice a very negligible instrument of oppression." Employers continued to rely mainly on the older legal controls provided by common law, the Statute of Artificers and the law of master and servant." (4)

(1) E.P. Bratton op.cit. p.80.70

(2) PRO HO/42/57 2.7.1801

PRO HO/42/57 2.8.1801

(3) A. Aspinall The Early English Trade Unions (1949)

D. George The Combination Law Economic History Review Vol.VI (1935) pp 172-178

D. George The Combination Laws Reconsidered. Economic History 1 (1926-29) pp. 214-228

G.D. Cole and A.W. Milson British Working Class Movements (London 1951). For a different interpretation see :

E.P. Thompson op.cit. pp 544-65

(4) A.E. Musson op.cit.

However, little has been done to discover in what light the acts were considered by government employees in the years immediately after their passage. There is a little material to show that at a later date, the under-secretaries of state exhorted reluctant employers to use this legislation. Also, it is clear that within the nineteenth century trade union tradition the period 1799 to 1824 was regarded as one of repression. This belief, and the sudden flourishing of labour organisations after the repeal of the Acts, suggests that modern commentators have been too sanguine in their appraisal of the operation of the law. It is not enough to say that the Combination Acts "...did little more than signify a state of mind influenced by the French Revolution." Political repression resulting from this neurosis dates from well before 1799. So, before it can be concluded that the Combination Act was of minimal importance, some attempt must be made to assess the fortunes of trade unionists between 1789 and 1799 to determine if there is any significant difference in attitudes and events before and after the Act. Ultimately, the study must be carried back beyond the Revolution. Similarly, if it is to be claimed that the flourishing of working class activity in 1824 was the result of the lifting of the threat of prosecution for criminal conspiracy and not the repeal of the Combination laws an examination must be made of the years after 1825 when the unions were once more made liable to conspiracy charges. It must be explained why trade union activity continued in the face of this threat when earlier they found it a deterrent.

Perhaps more weight should be put upon what working men thought was happening than on an objective assessment of the operation of the laws against combinations and other anti-working class legislation. After all, it may only have taken one successful prosecution in a district over a number of years for an example to be remembered.

The comparative failure of the machinery of the law to prevent the growth of unionism may be due more to the skill of the unionists and the effectiveness of "ad hoc unionism" than to the ineffectiveness of the law.

An example of the courage and ability of working men's leadership and the disciplined support given to such leadership is provided by Portsmouth Dock Yard employees.

From the official point of view, the trouble in the dockyards offered the government an opportunity to set an early example in disciplining the nations industrial workforce. However, it would appear that a prosecution for combination was not even considered. The care taken by the Dock Yard workers to protect themselves from criminal charges has been shown; but at Plymouth clear provocation in the form of a strike and a riot, was given the authorities. The opinions of the Attorney and Solicitor General were sought. Their reply was obviously considered to have been of general importance, for Portland sent copies to the Admiralty who forwarded them to the Navy Board, which in turn sent transcripts to the Dock Yards.

The law officers thought that the leaders of the Plymouth incident should be indicted for riot and conspiracy. As the Yard officers were present they would be able to bear witness. Others might be indicted to give evidence if indemnity, protection and rewards were offered. The lawyers finished by saying that the decision to prosecute or not was the Admiralty's, though there might be a risk of provoking a further strike.

"But we can not forbear stating that as long as that circumstance (i.e. the risk of a strike) is considered as sufficient to prevent Government from taking any steps to punish offenders of this description in that Place, it is in vain to enquire about what the law is because it is surrendering everything to the direction of the conspirators and rioters and it will be utterly impossible to prevent Excess." (1)

It would seem that in this case the authorities were advised to fall back on the well-tested legal devices in this case. It is possible that the law officers recognised that the riot at Plymouth had only the most tenuous connection with the activities of the corresponding committee and their delegates; so that a prosecution for conspiracy was not even worth considering. In the event, it would appear that no prosecutions were made at all. Possibly the disciplinary action of the Navy Board's investigatory committee was considered to be a great enough penalty. Also, the panic at the Admiralty may have subsided allowing a more reasonable approach to have been made. The fact that the Yards' committees were still corresponding and the warning that further trouble could not be ruled out, may have influenced the policy pursued by the administration.

The dispute of 1801 demonstrates the solidarity that existed among Yard workers, not only in individual Yards but between all naval bases. A year later, events were to show that this occupational solidarity extended to the workers in the merchant service for the Admiralty tried to use workers from Portsmouth and the other Dock Yards to break a strike of civilian ship-building workers. The trouble began on the River Thames in May 1802, when the sawyers there, both ordinary sawyers and those who specialised in cutting ships' timbers, went on strike. In the middle of this dispute the civilian caulkers also stopped work and the shipwrights put forward demands of their own. (1)

John Gast, who was then a leading hand in Mr. Dudman's yard, played a major part in the dispute both writing an account of the strike and, later, giving evidence to a Parliamentary Commission.

(1) C.N. Parkinson Trade in the Eastern Seas 1793-1815 (Cambridge 1937) p.103

Gast claimed that high war wages and good employment had drawn many provincial shipwrights to the Thames but that with the Peace of Amiens the masters combined to reduce wages. The shipwrights countered this by seeking legal advice from Thomas Erskine, sending a series of deputations to the masters and publicising their cause in the newspapers. (1)

Nearly all the Thames civilian shipwrights were members of the St. Helena Friendly Society, which appears to have operated as a trade union. It was founded in 1793. A second society, the Hearts of Oak, was formed by Gast in 1802. (2) The River shipwrights had already displayed their military and their petition of 1795 has already been considered. Moreover, two years later, they brought work on the Thames to a halt in protest over one of their number being impressed. (3) However, in 1802, probably in order to avoid prosecution, there was no open strike; work continued on new ships but the shipwrights refused to repair the merchant fleet that arrived that summer.

Besides the Shipbuilding Masters, two institutions had a close interest in the proceedings on the river; the Navy and the East India Company. Most of the latter's ships were built and repaired on the Thames, and the Navy relied heavily on the merchant builders to supplement its own facilities, usually fully employed in repair and maintenance work, for building new vessels. Private yards were scattered around the coast but the major concentration was along the Thames; thirty-seven establishments employed about two thousand shipwrights and over three hundred caulkers.

(1) J.N. Gast Calumnies against the Shipwrights defeated. 1802

(2) RP Select Committee on Combination Laws op.cit.

(3) ~~See above p.8~~

However, only eight or ten of these yards were capable of building vessels of any great size. (1) None-the-less these yards were of vital importance to the Navy and of inestimable value in the economic strength of the country.

The East India Company tried to use apprentices and illegal men, "...some welch lads ... who had never served an apprenticeship" to over come the shipwrights. (2) They also appealed to the Admiralty for aid. The Admiralty's response was to order that a hundred caulkers be sent for the Royal Dock Yards at Deptford and Woolwich to work on East Indiamen in the yards of Messrs. Wells, Barnard, Brent and Dudman. (3) Co-operation between the Navy and the merchant builders was not new. It has been shown how the Navy sometimes blacklisted workmen so as to prevent them finding employment with civilian masters. (4) In 1795 the merchant shipbuilders asked the Navy to deal similarly with any workman named by any seven private builders. (5)

A week after the Admiralty's order concerning the caulkers the merchant builders complained that none of the Dock Yard labour had been able to reach their premises. The Admiralty advised them to request the aid of the civil powers who would, if they were unable to deal with the situation, call upon the military for assistance. (6) The promise of police protection, which in the circumstances of the early nineteenth century was bound to be inadequate, was not enough to persuade the Deptford and Woolwich men to go up river. Twenty or thirty police officers

(1) See p.

(2) Gast op.cit.

(3) PRO ADM/2/632 19.7.1802

(4) See above

(5) NMM ADM/BP/15a 25.9.1795

(6) PRO ADM/2/032 26.7.1802

'Runners' from London, were sent to the shipyards; but they only exasperated the workmen.

"Such a number of respectables prying about the yard, listening to whatever was said, which they were ready to cut and garble to their own advantage, and carry to the Builders, as a sort of recompense for their pay; made it extremely unpleasant to the jobbing companies, so much so that many desisted work for the day." (1)

Additional caulkers were ordered to travel from Chatham, but only their quartermen arrived, the others having turned back after meeting angry strikers. (2) The Navy Board threatened to dismiss all who refused to obey orders. A few days later this instruction was countermanded by the Admiralty who instead tried bribery, offering an apprentice to all those who agreed to break the strike. (3) Some men, in the face of promise and threat, must have proved obliging; for on the third of August a riot against caulkers from Deptford took place in one of the Merchant yards. (4)

Hopes of an arbitrated settlement were dashed when another incident took place in which Chatham caulkers trying to come up the river by boat were turned back. (5) The Home Office circularised the Thames-side Police offices on how to deal with the situation. Four days later a naval sloop brought the men from Chatham to Mr. Dudman's yard. The Navy Board sought further volunteers. (6) At Sheerness they were met with a blank refusal by the caulkers; the Woolwich shipwrights reacted similarly; but the carpenters in Ordinary were willing to go and were sent to Randall's yard. (7) Gast was scathing about the "ten or

- (1) Gast op.cit.
- (2) PRO ADM/106/106 2230 29.7.1802
- (3) PRO ADM/2/632 30.7.1802
- (4) Aspinall op.cit. p.45
- (5) Ibid p.48 PRO ADM 106/2230 6.8.1802
- (6) PRO HO 43/13 6.8.1802 and PRO ADM/2/632 7.8.1802
- (7) PRO ADM 106/2230 11.8.1802 and PRO ADM 106/2230 19.8.1802

twelve cabin shipwrights" who offered their services to the merchant builders. (1)

In fact, twenty-two men went to Randalls, but they were only at work a couple of hours before a crowd of five hundred shipwrights over-powered the police guard and expelled them. At Brents Greenland Dock, the same thing happened. Nepean, the Admiralty Secretary, informed the Home Office, "...the insurgents are in such force as to render it impossible to stem the torrent without the aid of the military." He had been unable to obtain the necessary assistance of troops and cavalry immediately because there had been no one with whom he could consult at the War Office or the Commander-in-Chiefs. (2)

Gast's account is rather different. He played down the riot blaming the authorities for starting and exaggerating it. The workmen at Randall's yard were not attempting to expel the carpenters ~~who~~ had gone there to work, but were only trying to establish their "legality".

"As it is the custom of the trade not to permit any stranger to work before showing his indenture of apprenticeship and otherwise establishing his right to the trade."

However, a police officer intervened and the King's men took to their boat. This caused a mob of "men, women and children of all descriptions" to rush in. The resulting disturbance attracted men who were "out to allowance", presumably that is taking a rest break, from Well's and Dudman's yards. Finding that the ships carpenter~~s~~s had left, the other workers quickly returned to their own yards but found themselves locked out. It was claimed, falsely said Gast, that Mr. Randall and his wife were assaulted. A stipendiary magistrate read the Riot Act, though all trouble had ended, and three men were arrested.

"Nothing was now to be seen, but the military parading the streets with drawn swords, loaded muskets and fixed bayonets

(1) Gast op.cit.

(2) PRO HO 28/28 21.8.1802

to the great terror of all the old women of both sexes." (1)

As the expelled caulkers were returning to Chatham, the Dock Yard Officers at Sheerness were unsuccessfully trying to persuade the shipwrights there to go to the upper Thames to break the strike. When the men who had fled from London arrived home, they refused to return even though promised a military guard and transport on board the Commissioner's yacht; they had already been questioned as to the names of their assailants. (2) The Sheerness caulkers were also still adamant about not breaking the strike and Nepean wrote to the Yard Officers :

"I am commanded by their Lordships to acquaint you that they will not be unmindfull of the want of zeal on the part of the above mentioned caulkers, when indulgences may be granted to the caulkers of the other yards of which they must not expect to participate." (3)

A few days later there was similar resistance among the carpenters at Sheerness and three were fired for refusing to go up river. (4) Some volunteers, however, were found and they were taken to work by O A A brig, on the 23rd and 31st August. Some of these men were probably from Portsmouth; for frustrated by the attitude of the workers in the eastern yards the Navy Board now looked there for strike-breakers.

Saxton has to report that : "We have not been able to obtain a single Volunteer from either the shipwrights or the caulkers borne as such". He was suspicious of the motive behind this unanimity and suggested that the Admiralty should order a certain number of companies to go: "...they would have been glad to have availed themselves of such authority as a shelter from the resentment of their Brother Artificers." (5) This was done and the men who refused to obey were discharged, along with their apprentices. The Resident Commissioner

(1) Gast op.cit.

(2) PRO ADM/2/632 23.8.1802
PRO ADM/2/632 24.8.1802
PRO ADM/106 2230 23.8.1802
PRO ADM/106 2230 24.8.1802

(3) PRO ADM/2 632 23.8.1802

(4) PRO ADM/106 2230 27.8.1802

(5) NMM POR/H/16 23.8.1802

had been too optimistic; for he had to report that four companies, eighty men, had to be gone through to make up the two gangs ordered east. (1) Even then the gang must have been under strength as only thirty men, including two shipwrights and two quartermen, went. Perhaps the workmen's resolve had been strengthened; the Commissioner reported that :

"They had Emissaries among them from the Eastward, one Finch formerly of Woolwich Yard who appeared in the Yard this morning but for want of his person being known was not discovered till going out of the Gate." (2)

Finch had gained entry to the Yard by saying that he had a message for one of the Dock Yard Officers. He was obviously a man of some resources. When taken before the town's magistrates for "disseminating a spirit of combination among the caulkers", he had counsel from London and the services of a local attorney Daniel Howard. Howard had been active as a radical in the mid-nineties. (3) As it was, Finch was allowed to go free after making an apology. (4) This is an interesting reflection on the scope of the civilian shipwrights and caulkers organisation and one can speculate on Finch's connection with Gast; perhaps Finch had been discharged for some part in the previous year's dispute. Obviously his name, if not his face, was known in Portsmouth.

Finch may have been at a meeting that the Portsmouth caulkers held to discuss the situation. If he was, he had to overcome the position held by men like George Page, one of the caulkers who had volunteered to go to the Thames, who declared that he knew the value of the King's service and would go to the River even if no one else

- (1) NMM POR/H/16 28.8.1802
- (2) NMM POR/H/16 26.8.1802
- (3) See *Belcw* p 584
- (4) Hants. Tel. Nov.1802

would support him. (1)

Forty-two caulkers were discharged from Portsmouth for refusing to black-leg and their names and descriptions were sent to the merchant builders. The reluctant caulkers at Chatham were also sacked, being replaced almost immediately; though the Navy Board were careful to stipulate that none should be entered in their place who had come from the Thames Yards or who had any connection with them. The names of all those discharged from the other yards were sent to Portsmouth. (2)

Those men that had gone to the River were well looked after. A daily payment was made to their families left in Portsmouth, though the Navy Board expressed some concern about the propriety of this. (3) As promised, the unity of the caulkers was not broken, each of the men was granted an apprentice, in November they were petitioning for the re-entry of the discharged men. This was consented to, except in the case of three men on whom Saxton had made adverse reports. It was also stipulated that none of these men were to be given apprentices without the Admiralty's special consent and the Navy Board was to be informed if they ever requested a transfer. (4) This order was not forgotten, for when fifteen servants were distributed among the caulkers in September, 1805 it was specifically stated that none were to go to the men who had refused to go to the merchant yards. (5)

On the Thames after seventeen weeks and three days, the committee of the St. Helena Friendly Society reached, through the good offices of a magistrate, an agreement with the masters and the dispute ended.

- (1) PRO ADM/106 1868 26.8.1802
- (2) NMM POR/C/24 26.8.1802
NMM POR/A/44 11.9.1802 and 15.9.1802
- (3) NMM POR/F/24 26.8.1802
PRO ADM/106 1868 26.8.1802
- (4) NMM POR/G/1 23.11.1802
NMM POR/A/44 15.10.1802
NMM POR/C/24 2.11.1802
PRO ADM/2633 24.11.1802
- (5) NMM POR/A/42 27.4.1799

To secure good order the Naval sloop stayed on the River until February. (1) The Government's artificers were instructed to return overland to their home yards.

This incident is striking in two respects: first, because of the light that it throws on the obviously close relations between the workers in the public and private yards; second, because it is a peacetime dispute, the Revolutionary Wars having come to a close in March, 1802. This timing makes the resistance of the workers even more creditable, for the rapid disarmament which was taking place was in itself a threat to their security; more so for the government employees than the civilian craftsmen whose masters replaced cancelled naval contracts with a spate of orders to build merchantmen. Another point of curiosity is that Gast, in both his contemporary account and later evidence about the affair, said that it was without violence. This may serve as a warning about the validity of the evidence of trade unionists on the early days of their organisations; for the dispute seems to have created large scale disturbances, the Admiralty paying for at least one prosecution for assault on the caulkers sent to Mr. Barnard's yard. The offender received a year's jail, quite a stiff sentence for such a misdemeanour. (2) Gast claimed that thirteen men were also prosecuted for combination and that all were acquitted. (3) In fact the whole affair bears the marks of having been an unusually bitter struggle.

There is no reason to believe, despite the sympathy that existed between the civilian ship workers and those in the Royal yards, that there was any formal organisation uniting both groups.

- (1) PP. Select Committee on Combinations op.cit.
C.N. Parkinson op.cit.
- (2) PRO ADM 106 1763 15.1.1803
- (3) Gast op.cit.

So far this account of labour disputes involving Portsmouth Yard workers has been carried through to the Peace of Amiens but its scope has largely been restricted to a few occupational groups only. We will now consider some of the other trades in the Yard and extend the analysis to the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The Smiths

The initial action of Portsmouth's smiths during this period was to join with the smiths from the other Yards in petitioning the Navy Board about two fairly persistent grievances, their hours and their beer. Portsmouth's smiths also forwarded two letters through the Foremen and Master Smith. Saxton warned the Board :

"Our Blacksmiths - I fear irritated by the other yards - testify to much uneasiness and are very desirous of Petitioning again for an answer to the Officers report of the 2d. instant ... But I tell them they must be cautious how they press the Board for an answer always keeping it uppermost with myself how much more infinite in consequence is a stop in this yard to that of any other."

The very excessive hours of the smiths have already been described and Saxton's sympathy with the smiths noted. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Navy Board was willing to try and reduce the working day but the beer question remained to disgruntle the men.(1)

In 1797 the blacksmiths were claiming that, because of inflation, the strength of their beer had been reduced and was, "...not of a quality sufficient to render them nourishment." If stronger beer was provided they said that they were willing to accept a smaller quantity. The Navy Board accepted this proposal, doubling the payment it made for a barrel of beer, and halving the smiths' ration. A further price rise was allowed after a petition was sent in 1801, and there was a further increase two years later.

(1) NMM POR/F/21 26.4.1795

The smiths' hours continued to be long, though a proposal to increase them to a treble day was rejected by the Navy Board in 1799, "...as it was impossible they can be sufficiently recruited with so short a period from their labour." (1)

A reduction in the work day was sought unsuccessfully by the smiths in 1802. The men's agitation continued next year when all the Yards sent petitions to London. Probably with the big troubles of 1801 in mind, the Navy Board wanted to know from the Master Smiths and foremen if they knew by what channels these memorials had been despatched: the officers denied all knowledge of the affair. However, the smith's tactic had the desired effect and the Yard Officers were asked to draw up a new scheme of work. New hours were proposed in April 1803, but do not appear to have been introduced until the July of the following year. The deal caused some slight unrest. Saxton reported to the Navy Board that he had received several remonstrances from the smiths, but they showed "...no immediate appearances of discontent." Though their complaints were about hours, the Commissioner felt that the smiths would be happier "...if they were not strongly impressed with the idea of their not being considered equally with other classes of Workmen, especially the Riggers." This feeling of inequality was prompted by a comparison not of wages but of working hours. There was probably also some discontent over status. (2) The Navy Board was made aware of the smiths' grievances by identical petitions from all the Yards. In connection with the agitation, a letter from the Admiralty Solicitor's Agent at Plymouth dated 1.4.1804 is of interest.

- (1) NMM POR/F/21 28.5.1795
NMM POR/A/38 2.6.1795
- (2) NMM POR/A/44 20.1.1801
NMM POR/G/1 26.8.1803
NMM POR/A/49 22.9.1803
NMM POR/F/21 30.4.1804

The Master Smith at Plymouth had reported to the Resident Commissioner there that all the smiths of the various Yards were in correspondence over their demands for shorter hours and that a strike was being planned. The Commissioner requested the solicitor to investigate the rumour with a view to a prosecution for unlawful combination. A sworn statement was taken from a smith, the Master Smiths nephew, who had originally revealed the plot. The nephew claimed that he had not been involved in the early stages of the organising because the other smiths feared that he might inform his uncle. The smiths had determined to lay their demand before the First Foreman: "...the First Foreman would acquaint the Master Smith, the Master Smith acquaint the Commissioner and the Commissioner would acquaint the Navy and Admiralty Boards"(1)

What would have been a most interesting combination, was forestalled by the implementation of the new working day. The reference to combination is of relevance to what has been said above indicating that the Dock Yard administration was aware of the Act's potential usefulness; unless this is an example of a lay man misusing the term by calling a conspiracy in restraint of trade a combination.

Besides their hours and beer, the smith's concern over status and equality with other workmen is significant because the same interest has also been noted among the shipwrights; therefore status must be regarded as an important concern of the Yard labour force. However, though other established occupational groups petitioned about wages and hours, they did not display concern over equal treatment, nor did they petition as frequently as the craftsmen already considered or take further action. Where the question of status was important, was with a class of artificer newly employed in the Dock Yard, the millwrights. During the period of this study the Dock Yards were

(1) PRO ADM 106 1763 1.8.1804

subject to great technological change. The symbol of these innovations was, as in industry as a whole, the steam engine. Accompanying it, and attendant machinery, was a new type of craftsman: the metal-working millwright.

Having no experience of building or repairing machinery, the Dock Yard had to recruit its millwrights from new sources of labour. As London was both near and the centre of the recently established engine-building and machine tool industry, the Yard looked there for men. The problem was that the London millwrights were very strongly organised; they had, apparently, three clubs. William Fairbairns' complaints against millwrights in the capital are well known and it is worth noting that the Combination Act of 1799 was inspired by a petition from the Master Millwrights asking for protection from combination among their workmen. (1) Those artisans who came to Portsmouth were members of the Society of Journeyman Millwrights and Simon Goodrich, the Yard Engineer soon became well acquainted with their rules.

Initially, the millwrights were supplied on contract by a London firm which also provided the Yard with machinery. In 1805 the Admiralty ordered that the men should be taken on to the established strength, but this involved several months of negotiation with the men over rates and conditions.

"This delay in entering the men arose from the difficulty of treating with them, being a rather refractory set and perhaps assuming a little consequence from the then unfinished state of the work in hand." (2)

The conditions that the millwrights expected were probably those that were marked, presumably by Goodrich, in his copy of the Journeyman's Society rule book. This included: a ten hour day, when

(1) J.B. Jefferys The Story of the Engineers (1946)p.9

(2) PRO ADM 106 1870 8.9.1806

light permitted; three breaks from work totalling two hours overtime paid at a graduated rate, the first two hours and a half being regarded as a quarter of a day, every additional hour being another quarter day. The rates of pay were to be five shillings and three pence when working for civilian Master Millwrights, and six and three when working for Gentlemen.

Goodrich offered: six and three for ten and a half hours work, one and a half hours in breakfast and a flat rate of seven and a half pence an hour for overtime. The millwrights were also to be mustered at call in the same manner as other Yard employees. Sick pay and the same pension rights as the shipwrights were also given. (1) However, the man stood by their rules. As Goodrich said in his badly written notes :

"The millwrights give their proposals in writing in answer to mine they insist upon the same terms as London Millwrights in every respect. With this I do not mean to comply - have some explanation with them - I offer the same wages as they will work for a master in London but will break thro' their other rules and insist upon their compliance with some of the necessary dockyard customs about breakfasting in the Yard coming to call, etc. which they object to, and the leading ones appear to leave unless they have their own way." (2)

Next day he wrote :

"Make fresh proposals for the Millwrights in which I complied with some little things they wanted, and explained this to them as my ultimatum from which I will not recede. Several of them declared they would take away their Tools on Saturday next. In order to weaken the confederacy I have thro' Linnaker the officer who supervised the millwrights offered four of the best of them a little more wages than the others - The whole number of them which we meant to have taken on is 15 - they are very unwilling that any of their London rules should be broken thro' as it would disgrace them with the London Club and I am determined to break thro' these rules were it for no other purpose than to do away with this connection." (3)

Four days later, on the sixteenth :

"Several of the Millwrights make a great parade of taking away their Tools, but the plan of offering more wages to some of them succeeds and introduces divisions amongst them they had all

- (1) PRO ADM 106 1870 8.9.1806
SM SG memo 19.7.1805, paper 151
- (2) SM.SG,Journal 12.11.1805
- (3) Ibid. 13.11.1805

signed the paper of their own proposals and agreed to go in case they were not complied with but are many of them staggered." (1)

In this game of bluff, Goodrich's nerves seem to have been the strongest; for on the nineteenth he wrote in his journal that nine of the men were back at work on the terms that he had offered and that the others were also expected to return, "...as they are lurking about." (2)

The men had been determined to maintain their links with London; perhaps they feared being excluded from their occupation if ever they returned there without having kept their union membership up. The Journeymen's Society claimed to impose its rules for 25 miles around the capital. Despite their agreement with Goodrich the millwrights appear to have kept some links with the Society, for more trouble broke out a year later.

One of the concessions that the Yard Engineer had made, was that the Millwrights could be mustered apart from the rest of the workmen by sight and not answering their names, "...the name of Call being then a straw at which they stumbled but they agreed that Call should be eventually introduced." (3) Goodrich discovered that even the sight muster had not been strictly enforced and that the men were leaving early which annoyed the workers in the wood and metal mills. Goodrich recorded in his journal :

"Having directed Mr. Linnaker to call his men in consequence of some little irregularities I had observed in their attendance and it having been understood that they were to be assembled at the proper times for call and their presence ascertained by sight if not by calling the name, and it also having been agreed that they would answer to call at any future time when it should be required, he signified to them last night that they were required to be called by himself this morning at the Pump House to which no objection was made. But this morning every Man Millwrights and Smiths

(1) Ibid 16.11.1805

(2) Ibid 19.11.1805

(3) PRO ADM 106 1870 8.9.1806

attended and having asked what they were to do and Mr. L. having answered as was desired of them last night they all left the yard together immediately saying they then knew what they had to do. Kingston the foreman was spokesman for the rest and appeared a Leader. They soon applied to the Master Shipwright alleging groundless complaints and making protest of having no objection to be called by the Clerk of the Cheque, he referred them to me and I had hardly been told of what had occurred before they called, a number of them, at my lodgings to know how the business was to be settled I briefly reprobated the impropriety of the step they had taken and left the consequences to their imagination." (1)

Goodrich went to the Yard to consult with the officers there and to ask Linnaker what would happen if all the millwrights did leave. The Master Shipwright claimed to be too busy to help and another senior official was also unco-operative, for, when Goodrich, "...mentioned the business to the Clerk of the Cheque", he said that he "...got nothing more than wise common place sayings from him such as men would be led but would not be driven etc. tending to throw blame on my own management." (2)

This reflection of friction between the officers is interesting; the established officers probably regarded Goodrich as an interloper and were jealous of him. The strength of his character is demonstrated by these extracts from his papers: one suspects that some of the Clerk of the Cheques' charges were probably justified. Next day Goodrich wrote :

"Considering further about the millwrights determined that Mr. Linaker should pay every one in full this afternoon and signify to each one that he was discharged by his own act of leaving the Yard and that if he wished to be returned he might apply to me individually and make a fresh agreement. None of them have offered to come to work yet and some of them make a shew of asking if they may be allowed to have their tools away. I point out to the Commisr. what steps I propose to take and he after enquiring whether it would be possible to do without these men in case they should all go on hearing my reasoning on the subject agrees to leave it entirely to me and to afford me every support in his power observing that as far as he can understand it the business is at present in my hands. The men were accordingly paid off

- (1) SM SG Journal 5.9.1806
- (2) SM SG Journal 5.9.1806

as they called for their Money in the Afternoon and quietly told they were discharged - This soon brought some of them to me, particularly the smiths under pretence of demanding their expences to town, but in reality to parley about their being re-entered - I determined I would treat with only one at a time and for himself only and intended to do away all remains of their London Rules to reduce their wages down to 6/- pr. day from 6/6 and 6/3 and take away the half hour watering time which they were paid for - Tell the smiths to call again to-morrow morning and the Millwrights on Monday in order that I may have made up my mind as to terms." (1)

In the event, the smiths accepted Goodrich's proposals; it should be made clear that the smiths referred to here are not the yard smiths who have been examined elsewhere but those that worked with the millwrights. Judging from what Goodrich said of them, they do not appear to have been as strongly organised as the millwrights nor was their position likely to have been so independent as they were probably easier to replace.

Goodrich drafted, "...a memorial of new terms for entering the Millwrights the first, Articles to be given up by them. (2) These "Articles", were presumably the London club rules. Six men accepted this paper and they were taken before Commissioner George Grey. Goodrich said that he "...talks to them in a very proper manner indeed I am delighted with the whole of his conduct in this business." For his part, the Resident Commissioner reported this meeting and his support for Goodrich to the Navy Board :

"I have the satisfaction of Acquainting you that most of the millwrights have come to their senses this morning and that Mr. Goodrich with my concurrence has re-entered six of them." (3)

Grey was not sure how to deal with these men because as they were under the direction of General Benth^Aem, he had no instructions about them. Some of the discharged millwrights tried to see the Commissioner but he merely referred them to Goodrich, after giving them a lecture. One of these men was the foreman who apparently

(1) SM SG Journal 6.9.1806

(2) " 7.9.1806

(3) NMM POR/F/28 8.9.1806

directed the dispute. Goodrich was :

"...objecting to entering Kingston who has been too active in leading the others altho' he applied & I have no doubt would have accepted the terms had they been offered." (1)

Ultimately this man, because he was a superior workman, was re-entered and Kingston had a successful career in the Yard; he was transferred to Sheerness to supervise the millwrights there and later became the Master Millwright at Portsmouth. (2) One other man was also refused entry; two, after agreeing to come back, went to London instead, leaving the rest of the thirteen millwrights and ~~five~~ smiths to return to the Yard after promising not to make rules for themselves.

"The London rules being disadvantageous to the better hands and incompatible with the rules proper to a Dock Yard, the men are to give up all idea of being regulated by such rules to which at this distance they are not bound to adhere by the very rules for their own government which in the Public Service must necessarily be left in the hands of Superiors." (3)

Goodrich also tightened discipline generally, introducing a fine for late arrival and forbidding the men to leave off work more than five minutes before the time they were allowed to go. No one was to pass the Yard clock before it struck the hour marking the end of work. Previously, the time taken to walk to and from the Yard gate had been counted as working time. Generally, the millwrights were: "To be regulated by the Dock Yard rules and customs in such matters as are not otherwise hereby provided for." (4)

This incident with the millwrights reveals something about the attitude of both workers and management. It would seem clear that the millwrights found the change in status involved in entering employment in the Dock Yards difficult. Discipline there was a lot

(1) SM SG Journal 10.9.1806

(2) NMM POR/F/30 1.12.1809

NMM POR/F/31 28.6.1811

(3) PRO ADM/106 1870 8.9.1806

(4) PRO ADM/106 1870 8.9.1806

tighter than they were used to. Being mustered at call like common labourers was beneath their dignity. There is a hint of compromise in Goodrich agreeing that they be mustered by sight if not actually answering their name; but, apart from this saving of pride, his victory over the millwrights appears to have been complete and they caused no further trouble.

The methods that Goodrich used were basically of the 'divide and rule' variety. He recognised that the influence of a few independent individuals was very strong in forming the strikers' determination; by dealing with the men individually Goodrich overcame this. In fact, this was a reversion to the old workshop-Master-journeyman relationship. Goodrich's inborn hostility to the idea of a union among the men is revealing. He felt that the trouble he was going to was worthwhile just to destroy the organisation among his employees. It is noteworthy that not only did he forbid any connection with London but that he also prevented the creation of a new combination in Portsmouth, a less tolerant attitude than that generally displayed by the Dock Yard administration prior to 1800.

Besides millwrights, other new types of worker were coming into the Yard and they also created initial problems for Goodrich. In August 1804 one of the newly entered founders left because the Yard would not pay him what he demanded. (1) It was said, that the others would follow if their wages were not raised. Again the demands were for the conditions that had been enjoyed in civilian employment, this time in the Midlands. A year later Goodrich had to address the men working in the woodmills, as he recorded in his journal :

(1) NMM POR/A/46 7.8.1804

"Considering in the morning what to do about the people at the woodmills objecting to shorten the dinner time and yet expecting to be allowed a full day - Determine not to give way to them - Call them together and speak to them on the subject they are brought to reason and do not object to comply." (1)

The only other labour incident during the post-Amiens period involved the house carpenters, though some other workmen were concerned. The Yard employees were annoyed by a change made in 1811 by the Committee of Revision in the time they finished work on a Saturday. It had been the custom for more than half a century for the men to go an hour early on a Saturday but this "indulgence" was removed. Apparently the change was a mistake; the Committee did not know of the custom and had just established a time when work was to end. On the first weekend, when the new finishing hour was supposed to come into operation, the men stopped work at their customary time and made a demonstration which the Commissioner had to restrain personally. *The house carpenters, one of whom was discharged as a ring-leader, were particularly forward in the affair.* (2)

The trouble was carried beyond the walls of the Yard and placards calling on the Yard people to defend their rights were put up in the Town. Disturbed, the Navy Board sent detailed instructions to the Commissioner:

"...you will assemble the artificers of your yard and acquaint them of the high displeasure of their Lordships of their improper and disorderly conduct; so different from the workmen at Chatham and Deptford who in a proper manner presented a respectful Petition for the continuance of the said indulgence, noting particularly the flagrant misconduct of the House Carpenters whose proceedings on this occasion appear to their Lordships to be most reprehensible and you will inform these House Carpenters that unless they manifest a proper and immediate contrition for their misconduct you have received their Lordships positive directions to discharge them from His Majestys service." (3)

- (1) SM.SG.JL.22.10.1805
- (2) NMM POR/F/31 18.2.1811
- (3) NMM POR/G/3 21.2.1811

Within two days, a petition came from the carpenters expressing the required sentiments and promising future good behaviour.

The swift and firm reaction from the authorities indicates a change in attitude towards disturbances in the Dock Yards. Before giving further consideration to this point, it is necessary to review the few actions of protest in the Yard which involved all, or a cross section, of the Yard Workforce.

There is little in common in any of these incidents, though two (those of 1798 and 1809) are petitions about holidays. In both cases a statutory holiday fell on a Sunday and the men requested that they be given the Monday following, in lieu. (1) On the second occasion they quoted a precedent in support of their claim, something that the Naval authorities were always very sensitive to, even though the Yard officers had forgotten this particular one. (2) Another affair involved a memorial from the "Mechanics" of Portsmouth complaining of the lowness of their wages; but, apart from the major crisis of 1801, this was the only petition concerned with pay demands sent by more than one occupational group. Combined action had been taken, however, in 1798 when there was a delay in the payment of wages. Saxton warned the Board :

"The Dealers and creditors of our People in the Yard appear to be urging them on to express their dis-satisfaction at the unusual delay in Payment of the Yard."

The workers sent a deputation to the Resident Commissioner but he must have been able to calm them for no serious incident resulted. (3)

Another brief conflict blew up in 1805 when, as a result of another reform, the men were required to take their mid-day meal within the Yard. The Commissioner had to report that half the men

- (1) NMM POR/H/3 1798
- (2) NMM POR/F/29 5.5.1809
- (3) NMM POR/F/23 13.4.1798

had ignored the new regulation and had gone home at dinner time. Grey mustered the men who had stayed in the Yard and commended them, saying that he was already looking into the matter. For the present, he felt that all would continue to be quiet but that a quick decision from the Navy Board was needed: if the men were paid for staying in the Yard they might be weaned from their old habits. The Navy Board, however, decided that the men would be allowed to leave. By the end of the year, as if to prove that everybody could not be satisfied at the same time, the shipwrights were requesting to be allowed to work their dinner hour. (1) They were probably prompted by the reduced earnings that resulted from shorter winter hours. (2) As this incident was the last to seriously disturb the Yard during our period we now consider the way in which the yard men conducted their disputes.

The habit of drawing up the memorials and petitions provides a useful basis for an analytical division of trade union type activities of the Yard workmen. Those protests using such methods, have about them a certain formality; others are spontaneous and can be characterised as informal. In this latter category can be placed : the trouble over Mr. Boddy, the affair over the workman discharged for abusing a Warder and the dinner time and Saturday finishing disputes.

Attention has already been drawn by political historians to the importance of petitioning in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century politics. For the working classes this form of activity came to a climax in 1848 with the Chartists; but, the same type of agitations, on a smaller scale, had been used by workers

(1) NMM POR/F/26 1.4.1805 and NMM POR/G/2 3.4.1805

(2) NMM POR/G/2 20.12.1805

throughout the eighteenth century for economic ends. (1)

Before Laissez Faire became the dominant ideology Parliament was looked to for a paternalistic regulation of a variety of trades and large lobbying campaigns were organised. In taking their grievances to Parliament in 1801 the Dock Yard workers were, therefore, acting in the tradition of eighteenth century labouring men. Moreover, as Government employees they may have felt that they stood in a special relationship to Parliament. At a more mundane level, the presentation of memorials and petitions to employers stating grievances and demands was a common procedure on the part of craftsmens' societies and clubs and had been legislated against. (2) None, however, could have developed the system to the extent that the Government's Naval employees did. In the years 1793 to 1815 the Dock Yard authorities received at least 140 petitions from groups of workers in Portsmouth: individuals were responsible for even more.

The mechanics of petitioning can be pieced together from the records of the Dock Yards. Grievances arising among the artificers should have been dealt with, first, by the foremen and Master of the trade concerned. It was to them that the Resident Commissioner turned for information on the feelings of the workmen. They were consulted when any petitions were received and when the Navy Board was framing its answer. Ultimate responsibility for labour relations, within a single Yard, lay with the Resident Commissioner as all petitions were supposed to pass through his office. When the ropemakers tried to send a petition directly to the central authorities they were brusquely told that the Navy Board would not

- (1) P. Fraser Public Petitioning and Parliament before 1832
History XLVI (1961) pp.195-211
 Jephson The Platform (1892)
 S & B Webb op.cit.
 E.P. Thompson op.cit.
- (2) The Spitalfield Silk Act of 1773 had a clause prohibiting the presenting of petitions by groups of more than 10 men. See
 D. Marshall The Role of the Justice of the Peace in Social Admin. (1974)
 H. Harder & H.R. Lyon (eds) British Government and Administration (1974)

consider any memorial that was not forwarded by the Commissioner. (1)

On a similar occasion, the petition was ignored and the ropemakers were not even told that it had been received; the Board's concern over the smiths' petition, sent to them directly, has been noted. (2)

If necessary, the Navy Board would lay the petition before the Lords of the Admiralty who might then order an investigation. Decisions were passed back in reverse order. Obviously the whole affair could become a lengthy process and the workmen sometimes became impatient; hence their attempts to short-circuit the system. The blacksmiths' concern in 1795 has been cited, while the storehouse labourers had to present three or four petitions to get a response to a request for their hours to be reduced. Pay issues in particular were always liable to be subject to a considerable delay because the basic wages of the Dock Yard workers could only be altered by the King through an Order in Council. For some years after 1804, the Board was refusing petitions on the grounds that the issues involved were subject to enquiry by a Parliamentary Commission so that no action could be taken until an official report was forthcoming. (3)

One means of overcoming this sort of delay was to petition the Board directly; either, as has been shown, by sending memorials and delegates to London, or by approaching Navy Board members in person when they visited the Yard. On one such visitation in 1813, sixteen groups took the opportunity to present petitions. (4)

Despite the exceptions that have been considered, it seems clear that there was a well understood and accepted mode by which grievances and requests were presented to the Navy and Admiralty Boards, and by which those authorities expected them to be brought forward. Equally,

(1) NMM POR/A/43 6.5.1800

(2) See above p.

(3) NMM POR/G/2 20.4.1808

NMM POR/G/2 14.2.1807

NMM POR/A/49 22.3.1808

(4) NMM POR/G/3 12.10.1813

NMM POR/G/3 23.9.1813

there was a conventional language in which the memorials were properly couched. This explains the almost sycophantic tone of the petitions and which at times seems hard to reconcile with, on ^{the} one hand, the Yard men's rough and rude actions, and, on the other, the ^{ir}disciplined, self-respecting solidarity.

Two examples, both from the ropemakers but still generally representative, serve to illustrate the style used in petitions. In 1807 they wrote : "That your Petitioners most humbly present their grievances, trusting your honour will condescend to receive and to take into serious consideration." (1)

A year later they claimed their petition : "...most humbly showeth That your petitioners Most Humbly solicit the favour that your Honour would condescend to Grant your Petitions the following days for mutual rejoicing." They complained that they were not allowed holidays on the 5th of November or the 29th of May,

"...and what more immediately concerns us the Birth and Coronation of our Most Gracious Soverign George the Third under whose mild Government most of us have been brought up. Government in their wisdom appointed part of each of these days to their workmen as a relaxation from their labours that these remarkable events might be retained in their memory." (2)

There were also sound practical reasons for the Dock Yard workers to be careful in choosing the words used to address their masters. The recipients of the petitions were aristocrats and gentlemen and had to be addressed as such. A code of respect had to be maintained; the Yard workers would not normally have considered stating their terms in a bold "or else" manner any more than they would have addressed the Resident Commissioner by his christian name or without taking their hats off. To have tried either experiment would have been to invite immediate reprisal. The aim of petitioning was not to antagonise the authorities but to win material advantages. It must not be forgotten just how cautious the participants in any

(1) NMM POR/D/28 8.1807

(2) NMM POR/D/28 21.9.1808

labour agitation would have to be to avoid falling foul of the law, or even the social conventions of the time. It was better to appear hypocritically loyal than to even hint at political or social subversion. However, behind the respect of the workers lay the strength given by organisations and, for the skilled men, an advantageous negotiating position as long as the country was at war.

The reaction of the Navy Board and Admiralty to the Yard workers' actions shows the strength of the code that defined their relations with their employees. Saxton's strong objection to the shipwrights' petitions in 1795, the Admiralty's reaction to the demonstration by the house carpenters and other artificers in 1811 can be cited as examples. The recurrent use by the authorities of phrases such as "Liberal Condescension" and "countenances and indulgencies" to describe their own actions in response to the workers demands, indicates a certain paternalistic concept of labour relations in the Dock Yards. By tempering discipline with concessions, the Naval authorities could create the same impression of beneficence that the ruling classes generally could do by the application of the prerogative of mercy in criminal matters. The desire on the part of the Admiralty not to be too harsh has been noted in connection with the incidents of 1795 and 1802. This attitude was undoubtedly based on the Navy's need for labour during wartime. Little compunction was shown in laying men off when peace returned. Backed by the very real power of the law and armed force the Admiralty could afford to be magnanimous. When, as in 1801, that power appeared to be challenged no mercy was shown in dealing with the crisis and a proper system of subordination was strictly upheld.

The situation in which the workers in H.M. Dockyards operated can be compared to a game; both sides, the workers and the Naval authority, knew the rules and that while they were observed, all would be reasonably well, and any tensions that arose could be managed and resolved to the mutual satisfaction of both parties. The significant point is that the labourers and craftsmen in Portsmouth never sought seriously to challenge those rules; suggesting that, by and large, their commitment to the game, that is their commitment to the then existing social system, was almost total. This willingness to play, to accept the system, found expression in petitioning.

The most striking feature that emerges from an analysis of the petitions sent by groups of workers, is the large number that originated from the shipwrights. Prior to 1803 most of these, 18, were from visiting gangs wishing to return to their home Yards. Generally, this sort of request was not well received by the Navy Board and work gangs from elsewhere were only brought to Portsmouth in times of emergency such as when the resources of that place were inadequate for swiftly repairing a battle or storm torn fleet. However, the Board took pains to return men to their own Yards as soon as possible, sometimes replacing one gang by another from the same Yard. Not all the visiting workmen were unhappy about being in Portsmouth, and on several occasions the Navy Board found itself faced with counter petitions. In 1798 the Board complained that :

"As the Deptford Caulkers employed in your Yard have petitioned to remain at Portsmouth We are at a loss to know whether We are to consider them as part which mean to return." (1)

This demonstrates one of the weaknesses of petitioning as a form of negotiating; for unless signed by all the protesters the authorities could not always be sure what weight to attach to a petition.

(1) NMM POR/A/ 29.6.1798

The temporary transfer of bodies of workers and individuals was an important way in which links between the Yards could be built up. One of the conditions attached to the re-entry of the men who had refused to go to the Thames in 1802, was that the Admiralty was to be informed if they requested a transfer. It is not surprising that in their petitions the workers should reveal a good knowledge of the conditions in other Yards and use comparisons with them to justify their own claims. In such cases the Navy Board made careful enquiries. On several occasions the officers in Portsmouth had to report about the local situation which had been cited in petitions from other ports. Often the Board was willing to concede these claims as they frequently revealed genuine inconsistencies in Naval administration, which arose from the failure of the officers to obey or understand the Board's orders.

As has been shown, co-operation between the labour forces of the various Yards did not end with the exchange of information, but it must be noted that most inter-Yard petitions were from the members of the same trade. This is as might be expected. Communication along this line would be easiest and common grievances most likely, but it is interesting that there was a desire to establish a standard of working conditions common to all the Yards. Similarly, within Portsmouth Yard, demands were put forward on the basis of comparison with other workers, this was a particular concern of the shipwrights because they were distinguished by the variety of occupations in which they were involved: a situation which led inevitably to differentiation in earnings and hours. They therefore appear to have been very active in trying to establish a common rate of earnings by standardising hours and rates.

After the shipwrights, the most active petitioners were the ropemakers. The militancy of the ropemakers may be explained by the fact that many of their requests were refused; alternatively, their militancy and criminal activities may have prejudiced the authorities against them; that is, the ropemakers may have had to pay the penalty for transgressing the rules of the game. Nearly all the other occupational groups in the Yard were involved in sending petitions, including the clerks and the Master workmen. Though most of those involved were skilled, nobody was excluded from the practice and apprentices and even convicts employed in the Yard sent memorials to the Admiralty. The unskilled were just those groups who would be most likely to be lacking in the characteristics on which petitioning rested, the ability to formulate demands literately, to organise to obtain advice and help, and the commitment to the rules of the game and a knowledge of them..

The subjects on which petitions were sent were very diverse emphasising how important a means of communication petitions were. Not only were complaints about working conditions channelled through this means; even grievances about the assessment of income tax were put in the form of a petition. (1)

The persistent and wide-scale use of such a formal means of protest as the petition, clearly implies considerable, though not necessarily long-term, organisation on the part of the Yard workers. In certain incidents, such as that of 1801, this is quite explicit in the evidence. However, in only two jobs is there any suggestion that this organisation was permanent. In one, that of the millwrights, it has been shown how this long term connection was broken. The ropemakers provide the only other example of activity that would fit

(1) NMM POR/G/2 16.5.1802

the Webbs' definition of Trade Unionism. Even so, in the face of all that has been said above about labour and workers organisation in Portsmouth Dock Yard, it does not seem right to dismiss all other activity as ephemeral. It was for this reason the term "ad hoc unionism" was used in the introduction to this study. What it is hoped to convey in this phrase is the ability on the part of workingmen effectively to pursue the aims of trade unions by impermanent association and using common and repeated forms of action. Petitions, ad hoc committees and representative democracy were the Yard workers' weapons against their employers. Every time a dispute of any importance occurred, the workers' interests were represented by delegates. Gast gives an interesting account of how these men were chosen and how their brief was drawn up by a committee. Most probably, it was quite usual for the same man to be sent to such meetings and for the same dominant personality to find himself in the chair, without there being any elaborate procedure to ensure that this was so. Men with experience and who were trusted, would naturally be looked to for leadership time and time again. However, a brilliant newcomer, such as Gast, could still find his way onto the committee. In this respect it is interesting to note that the Chairman superseded by Gast, also one of his fellow delegates to Saxton, Edward Fabian, was dismissed from the Dock Yard in 1801 as a member of the corresponding committee. Another shipwright similarly dismissed was a Thomas Fabian, who was also the treasurer of the Dock Yard co-operative. George Morley, the third delegate in 1797, is not mentioned again though one Thomas Morely was also a committee man in 1801.

Once chosen or elected, the committee men and delegates appear to have been directly responsible to the mass they represented and a final decision had to be generally approved. In the trying

negotiations of 1795, the Navy Board were exasperated by the number of times the delegates had returned to them, after apparently consulting all the shipwrights, with a rejection of their latest offer. That the consultations between delegates and the workers took the form of mass meetings is implied by the fact that the delegates were unable to reply to an offer because part of the body of shipwrights were working afloat and could not be reached. The anonymous writer who kept the Navy Board informed in 1801 said that there had been a meeting not only of the shipwrights but of the whole labour force and suggested that a vote of some sort had taken place.

A reference for 1797 suggests that meetings initiated the Yard workers' industrial actions. In this instance, there was an unsuccessful attempt to arrange a meeting in a Portsea public house in order to consider a demand for peace-time wages. (†) Unfortunately, we have no evidence as to how such meetings were organised. Nevertheless, it would seem certain that when there were grievances among Dock Yard men to be expressed and remedied, there was in Portsmouth Yard, at least, a well tried and well-understood method of doing so without any acknowledged formal trade union. This raises the question of whether or not Portsmouth's workers were capable of forming permanent organisations. Moreover, if they were, were these bodies in possession of the characteristics we have described?

From the outset, in answering these questions, it is necessary to say that in common with their colleagues in civilian employment, the men involved in building and equipping ships in Portsmouth showed

(†) See below p. 600

a flair for creating stable and long lived organisations; but those established in Portsmouth were of a different nature from their civilian counterparts. The Saint Helena Friendly Society on the Thames has already been mentioned and its function as a trade union demonstrated; yet its friendly society activities must not be overlooked. A similar body was established at Liverpool which like its London counterpart, built almshouses, and had a reputation for militancy in labour disputes. So powerful was this body that it actually controlled the return of the borough M.P.s, one of whom introduced, in 1800, a bill to amend the Combination Act. On Tyneside there was also a long established shipwrights' corporation, though at this date it was in decline and being superseded by societies formed further down the river which combined unionism with benefit clubs activity. Also, an Act of 1793 prohibited shipwrights striking when repairing a vessel which was due to sail, illustrating that their activities had come to the Governments' notice. (1) The ropemakers were also strongly organised and by the early 1820's, at least, had strong national links. (2) So that it is clear that shipbuilding workers generally were militant and well organised.

In Portsmouth there was only one large permanent institution which might have served as a cover for trade union activity. Two similar bodies, also considered, were not established until 1816.

In 1796 the Admiralty received a petition from the Yard workers which was not concerned with the usual matters of pay and conditions. The artificers and labourers of the Dock Yard were proposing to establish a flour mill and bakery on the co-operative

(1) 33 George III c.67 1793. This Act lasted 1800 when the Combination laws made it redundant.

(2) S & B Webb op.cit. p.39

Geo. Howell Conflicts of Capital and Labour (London 1890) p.82

The Records of the Society of Shipwrights of Newcastle on Tyne
ed. D.J. Rowe (Surtees Society 181. 1970)

principle. They told the Admiralty that they :

"Beg to request your support and encouragement which will stimulate us to every exertion and Abundantly prove your kind concern to the family and Person of the Mechanic and labouring Man..."

Besides playing on their employers paternalism the Yard

people also assured their Lordships that they did :

"...not mean in the least to Retrench on the Honest profits of either Miller or of Working Men they know that the Labourer is Worthy of his Hire their intention is not meant to effect the Honest profits but prevent the Fraudulent impositions." (1)

The organisers sought legal advice and through two Portsea solicitors approached Thomas Erskine, who found the proposals legally and politically sound, remarking :

"If there was constitution giving a popular control to all the body would never be at rest - Such constitutions are absolutely necessary for nations, but not at all for the management of limited and inferior bodies."

As well as being a well known radical lawyer, Erskine was M.P. for Portsmouth and he asked the two local attorneys to assure the society committee,

"...that I think myself much honoured by the trust they repose in me asking my advice, and that nothing in the world can give me greater satisfaction than to attend to the interests of a body of Men who deserve so highly of their country and who are so peculiarly entitled to my services as representative of Portsmouth." (2)

During the Thames dispute of 1802 the civilian shipwrights used Erskine's services and it is possible that the Yard workers had also sought his advice in their own confrontation with the Naval authorities the previous year. There is no proof of this, but clearly if the Portsmouth men needed advice they knew where they could find a sympathetic hearing.

The only surviving articles of the "United Society in the town of Portsea ... of the People belonging to His

(1) PRO ADM 1. 5125 1796

(2) PRO ADM 3375 28.3.1816

Majesty's Dock Yard near Portsmouth" are dated 1802 (1)

1802 is also the first year in which "David Miall, John Fabian and Co., Society Mill & Land" are entered in the Rate Books.

This concern was valued at £65. There was also a bakehouse and ovens at £24, a storehouse at £40 and a stable at £4, giving a total rateable value of £103. Previously the premises had been listed in the name of a different occupier; so that it might seem that the society had not built a mill but had purchased one with capital accumulated from subscriptions. (2)

However, a newspaper report of June 1796 stated that the foundation stone of the Dock Society Mill had been laid. (3) Just over a year later the society was advertising for a manager to run the bakery. (4) This confusion is difficult to resolve, unless the mill was rated until 1802 under the manager's name. In 1816 the mill was sold to the Ordnance Board for £10,000, quite a considerable capital sum. (5) The Society was dissolved, each subscriber receiving about £10, but a new mill society was established, lasting until 1834. (6)

The structure of the Society shows many of the features that characterised similar working-class organisations of this period. It was run by a committee for which elections were held every six months, half the members retiring at a time. The composition of

- (1) Articles of the United Society in the Town of Portsea (1802)
The formation of societies to build corn mills may have been an important but generally unremarked-upon feature of the seventeen-nineties. Society mills were built in Nottingham, Birmingham, Hull and Whitby and probably elsewhere. See R.A. Pelham Corn Milling and the Industrial Revolution in England in the Eighteenth Century University of Birmingham Historical Journal VI (1958) pp 161-175; in particular p.172
R. Wailes The English Windmill (1954) p.155
- (2) PCRO Poor Rate Book 1802
- (3) Portsmouth Gazette 1796
- (4) Portsmouth Gazette 1797
- (5) Hant Co. 31.10.1811
- (6) P.S. Horne Britain's first Co-op in Portsmouth? Hampshire Magazine 9 (March 1909) pp 29-30

this committee is interesting for it was based on the representation of trades. There were two delegates from each of the following groups : the quartermen, the caulkers, smiths, joiners, house carpenters, sailmakers, sawyers, ropemakers, and scavelmen. There were one bricklayer, three labourers, and seven shipwrights, a total of twenty-seven. Clearly, because of their numbers, superior and economic position and status, the skilled craftsmen, particularly the shipwrights, dominated; but it is highly significant that labourers were not excluded all together, in fact they were encouraged by a lower subscription rate of four shillings a quarter as opposed to six shillings for "mechanics". Taken in conjunction with evidence of how labour disputes were conducted, this indicates a democratic outlook and provides little evidence for the trade exclusiveness so frequently remarked upon in general during this period.

The committee, though not directly supervising the mill and bakery, visited them twice a week after work. A subcontractor ran the bakery, at least, providing equipment, labour and raw materials other than flour. He had to deliver bread three times a week to members homes and they obtained their bread in exchange for tickets stating the number of loaves they were entitled to. Bread issues were related to the size of the family. In purchasing their first supply of wheat the Society invited sealed tenders and copied the form of advertisement and business used by the Victualling Office. Later they paid cash, so as to secure a good supply, to farmers and factors who bought samples to the mill. Occasionally, when the wind failed and the mill could not operate, the Society purchased flour, which meant that, as the society did not raise its prices, it made a periodic loss. Even so, they could still undercut the bakers by two pence to six pence per loaf. (1)

The rules which tied the committee so closely proved effective and the Society won general approval from the authorities. The Dock Yard lent equipment and in referring to a request from a man for six months leave, presumably on Society business, Grey said, "...the Society Mills are of the utmost benefit and relief to the Poor People in General." (1) The Hampshire Telegraph reported on 29th November, 1814 :

"The Artificers of the Dockyard some years since established a Corn Mill & Bakehouse by subscription, from which their families have been supplied with bread at less than the current price. On Wednesday last they had the gratification of reducing to eighteen pence per gallon; on which joyful event one of the subscribers illuminated every part of his house in Amellia Row..." (2)

The obvious success of their society probably encouraged the Yard workers to create another similar institution. In 1815 :

"The Artificers of this Dock Yard have resolved upon establishing a Brewery Company, upon the same plan as the Society they have some years formed, from which they purchase flour and bread, at a less rate than those essential articles for life at the shops." (3)

This was the "Union Society" founded for the purpose of erecting a malthouse and brewery. It differed from the first organisation in that non-Dock Yard members were allowed to join but in other respects it was similar. (4) Again there was a committee elected on a trade basis, there being one representative for the Principal Officers and Clerks, one for the Master craftsmen and foremen, and one for each group of Timber Converters and Measurers, Quartermen, Caulkers, ordinary caulkers, single stationed men, blockmakers, blacksmiths, joiners, house carpenters,

- (1) NMM POR/G/2 25.5.1808
NMM POR/H/17 13.8.1812
- (2) Hants. Tel. 29.11.1813
- (3) Hants. Tel. 4.2.1815
- (4) Articles of the Union Society op.cit.

sailmakers, millwrights, the metal mills, ropemakers, riggers and scavelmen. One man was to represent the painters, bricklayers, masons and braziers, three men the labourers, two the quartermen, shipwrights and six the other shipwrights.

Two points are worth noting. The first is that civilian members had no say in running the institution and second is the absorption as indicated by their presence on the committee, of the new trades, for example the millwrights, into the general body of the Yard employees. The inclusion of townsfolk in the organisation was due to the reduction of the Yard labour force following the end of the war, which also probably meant that a number of civilians were ex-Yard people.

Day-to-day affairs were to be supervised by a working committee of 10 to 15, held to their duties by fines for non-attendance and for refusing to accept office, normal friendly society regulations. The actual running of the brewery was in the hands of a permanent staff who had to pay a bond, a device the Yard people would have been familiar with, as it was used in the Naval service to ensure honesty in positions of trust, the bond was also used in commerce.

This societies articles may indicate the nature of the original basis on which the first co-operative was set up, and the means by which funds were accumulated. Besides the quarterly subscription, an additional six pence a week was paid until £1,000 capital was saved. On the strength of the capital, a mortgage was to be raised by four Trustees who had to be elected by two thirds of the society's membership. In all, the society had about 800 subscribers when its articles were printed, as compared to 900 for the United Society, that is between a quarter and third of the Yard work-force. In 1796 the original petition sent by the workers claimed the support of 1,500 people for the Mill Society. The Union Society included a number of clergymen and yard officers, one of whom was Simon Goodrich.

Later in 1816 another, even more sophisticated, society was set up. The Hampshire Telegraph reported :

"It will be heard, with much commendation of the Provident Intention, that an Institution is establishing in this Dockyard comprehending all classes of men employed in it, for their providing Pensions for their widows, their orphan children, until they attain the age of sixteen years, and in some particular cases for even the mothers of their members. Already upward of fourteen hundred persons have associated themselves together in this most praiseworthy design." (1)

Besides the common regulation about the committee, complex rules were laid down for the running of the scheme. (2) Ultimately a pension of £25 a year was to be paid out; initially however, £15 was to be given, but no payment whatever was to be made until a stock of £2,000 had been raised. The capital was to be invested in public funds, 3% Consolidated Bank annuities. For original members, any Yard worker above 21, the entrance fee was 4 shillings and the weekly subscription 3 pence a week for the first year and two pence a week after that. Future members were to be between 21 and 45 years old and had to be vetted by the committee; their contributions were dependent on the date of their entry, the date on which each had become eligible for membership and the age of each member's wife. Four trustees were to be appointed from among the principal Officers of the Yard, headed by the Resident Commissioner. Adulterers, fornicators, and other bad characters were to forfeit their pension rights. The society was still functioning in 1824 when its rules were registered before the Clerk of the Peace. By careful management and a cautious attitude to paying out benefit, so avoiding a drain on the institutions funds, the Yard workers had managed to

(1) Hants. Tel. 11.11.1815

(2) Rules and Orders and Regulations of Portsmouth Dockyard Pension Society (1816)

avoid an early collapse of their society; so often the fate of this type of benefit club. (1)

There are scattered references to a number of other organisations operating in Portsmouth, but details are scarce and the involvement of Yard people unclear. "The Dock Yard Penny Bible Association" had a good start by raising nearly £80 in the first quarter of its existence; after that nothing more is known of it. (2) Commissioner Saxton makes a passing comment about the recent demise of a hemp dressers' benefit club, and an entry in a fragmentary diary kept by a Yard worker in 1812, mentions a visit to the Rooms of the "Beneficial Society" to pay his friendly club subscription. (3) This society had been formed in 1754 for the "mutual aid" of its members, paying out sick and disablement allowances, also widows' pensions, and lending money at interest. A school for paupers had also been founded by the society. Membership was open to "Any Tradesman or substantial Housekeeper of sober life and conversation." (4) It is also possible that the society let its rooms to other bodies. There was a shipwrights' benefit society in the town; all that is known of this body is that it failed to get approval from the Magistracy for a change of its rules in 1805. (5) Further evidence of local associations is given by a brief newspaper reference to the many burial societies in the town. (6) While it might be expected that given their economic position and

(1) P.H.J.H. Gosden Friendly Societies in England 1815-75 (1961)

(2) Hampshire Telegraph 26.12.1812

(3) NMM POR/F/23 29.10.1799 PCRO 4a

(4) Laws and Regulations of the Beneficial Society (1754)

(5) PCRO S/6/7 Quarter Session Calendar Epiphany 1805

(6) Hampshire Telegraph 9.12.1815

craft skills the Yard workers would have co-operated in building clubs there is little evidence for this.

None of the organisations that have been reviewed seem suitable covers for trade union activity. Running such large concerns as a flour mill, bakery, a brewery and pension fund would have required all the efforts of their administrators and it seems likely that funds slowly accumulated would be put at risk, or that local approval would have been given to these societies if they were not what they appeared to have been. While these organisations sprang from the same attitude of mind and involved some of the same personnel as union activity, no formal link existed; yet it might be argued that the nature of the Yard workers unionist activities depended on these parallel institutions. To make this claim is to ignore the fact that, in taking the period 1773 to 1815, only a small fraction of the history of the Dock Yard workers has been considered and that the type of activity that has been described has a history stretching from the seventeenth century until the eighteen-eighties. To judge from secondary sources no parallel institutions existed for much of this period. In fact, on the basis of chronology the argument can be reversed and it can be suggested that the experiences and solidarity gained from "ad hoc unionism" contributed to the creation of organisation for purposes for which informal association was unsuitable. What makes "ad hoc unionism" in Portsmouth distinctive is its size and sophistication, not the existence of parallel institutions. Otherwise, the actions taken by many other eighteenth century workmen.

Looking at our period as a whole we can see a marked decline in labour disputes after the Peace of Amiens. Apart from the millwrights walk-out in 1806, the disputes of the Napoleonic wars tell us little about the Yard men's aims and organisations. In fact, the millwrights dispute was the last issue which

seriously disturbed the Yard during the French wars. The reason for this

end to labour troubles is obscure.

It is possible that after the disputes of 1801 and 1802 the Admiralty became more trenchant in its attitude towards labour unrest. However, there is little evidence of this. The breaking of the millwrights' union in 1806 was largely the work of one man, Simon Goodrich. We have seen the Yard authorities were uncertain how to deal with the millwrights, though the Resident Commissioner gave Goodrich the necessary backing. As far as the other trade groups are concerned there was no issue, after 1806, about which they attempted to organise a protest. To establish clearly that the Admiralty and Navy Board had adopted a new policy towards its workforce, we would need to point to an incident which we could contrast with the 1790's. No such episode arose. Why was this?

Whilst it is difficult to show a hardening of the Yard authorities' attitudes after 1806, it is possible to suggest that, in fact, labour relations improved. In the first place, there was a change of Resident Commissioner, when George Grey replaced Sir Charles Saxton in 1806. The differences in character and background of these two men have already been considered, and it is quite likely that Grey was better able than Saxton to deal tactfully with problems before they became large enough for him to have to note them officially. More generally, the many reforms that took place in the early 1800's may well have improved working conditions in the Dock Yard. The abolition of quarterly wage payments in arrears was an important advance for the workmen. As we have suggested, by and large the Yard artificers were probably able to improve their living standards. In this respect the first decade of the 1800's probably compared favourably with the 1790's. For instance, the last disturbance over food prices took place in 1801 and from 1796 many Yard workers had their

own source of cheap bread and flour in the Mill Society.

If we are correct in saying that, overall, the Yard men's standards of working conditions were at least maintained and possibly improved over the period 1793 to 1815, is it true to say that this situation can also be attributed to the effect of "ad hoc unionism"? That is, the final test of "ad hoc unionism" must be whether it fulfilled its purpose of maintaining and improving the working conditions of those who participated in it.

It is difficult to say whether the standards of working conditions in the Yard were upheld by the workers or whether they were the result of the Admiralty's beneficence and the Yard employees strong market position during wartime. It is even more difficult to say whether the Yard men had improved their conditions through their own efforts. Rarely were the workers totally successful in obtaining their demands; when they were, it was generally some minor issue that had assumed temporary importance because it threatened to become violent. Yet they were not often completely defeated.

While many of the Yard workers' actions appear to have been of a defensive nature, it must be remembered that in 1801 they had won a wartime family allowance. Even so, "ad hoc unionism" was more easily used for intermittent defensive actions than for seeking long term objectives and advances. The sporadic nature of the organisation involved in "ad hoc unionism" inhibited forward planning and policy making. Was such planning necessary: did workmen outside the Yard formulate long term policies?

The question of whether the Dock Yard workers needed to plan is really asking if they needed permanent unions. This raises yet another question. How are the requirements of labouring men to be judged? No simple answer to this query is possible. It would be anachronistic to compare the activities and aspirations

of Portsmouth Dock Yard workmen with those of TUC members, or even those of unionists of the mid-nineteenth century. The Yard workers are best compared with their contemporary counterparts in civilian employment.

The history of wooden shipbuilding workers is sadly neglected; no general survey is available, and local information is often scattered over a wide range of secondary works. (1) For the purposes of a limited testing of the concept of "ad hoc unionism", it is possible to consider the Thames shipwrights; in particular some further thought can be given to the dispute of 1802.

It will be remembered that the Thames shipwrights were well organised, having at least two societies and that they were involved in 1802 in a dispute that lasted seventeen weeks. The men at that date were resisting a wage cut, a defensive action. The shipwrights demanded five shillings a day, the masters offered four shillings and fourpence halfpenny. In the end, after several riots and arrests, the workmen agreed to take five shillings for a day and a quarter's work. That is, about the same sum as the original offer from the masters. In fact, it may have been less. The confusion arises because Gast in his account varies the terms in which he describes the shipwrights pay. (2) The main point, however, is quite clear; despite a press campaign, legal advice and an unusual degree of violence, (3) the organised shipwrights of the Thames won little or nothing. Further, they had exposed themselves to the rigours of the law and several men were prosecuted. Compared to this episode, the history of the Navy's shipbuilders is a success. It must not be forgotten that the Thames men had been able to make their refusal

- (1) Victoria History of the County of Durham Vol.2 1907 p.303
Evidence taken before the Committee appointed by the town
council to consider the present state of the shipbuilding
Trade in Liverpool. (Liverpool 1850)
Trade Societies and Strikes. Report of the Committee on
Trade Societies appointed by the National Association for
the Promotion of Social Science. (1860) p. 479-520
 D. Chapman The New Shipwright Building Company of Dundee
1826 to 1831. Econ. Hist. R. (1940) p.148-151
 J.F. Clark The Shipwright North East Group for the Study
of Labour History (No. 1 1967)
 J.S. Marshall A Social and Economic History of Leith in the
Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1969)
 See above p.
- (2) J. Gast op.cit.
- (3) J. Stevenson Popular disorder in London 1791-1821
(Oxford Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1973).

to take on new work effective, because the bulk of naval workers refused to blackleg. Even so, by concluding his rather polemical account of the affair with a call for Government regulation of the shipbuilding industry, Gast pointed to an important difference between the Government's shipwrights and those in civilian employment. By seeking Government intervention, civilian workers made it likely that they would have to use a more permanent form of organisation than "ad hoc committees" to lobby Parliament, monitor the response and plan action. Long term institutions could be as defensive as "ad hoc unionism" and, at this period, were just as likely to fail.

The close link between civilian trade unions and friendly societies, a link which became even closer after Rose's Friendly Society Act of 1793 and the Combination Acts, also made permanent and fairly elaborate organisation probable among civilian workers. The artificers and labourers in Portsmouth Dock Yard appear to have kept their friendly society and trade union activities separate.

Finally, it is possible that the Admiralty were opposed to the development of permanent unions and that their employees, knowing this, avoided provoking their masters. The argument is plausible, but it has been shown that the Admiralty had to tolerate a considerable amount of opposition from its employees. It can only be an unsupported hypothesis to suggest that a formal union could have created more trouble. Also, it has been demonstrated that the Admiralty had no more powers of disciplining its labour force than any civilian employer.

By and large, the Yard labourers and artificers were as successful in using "ad hoc unionism" to maintain and even improve their working conditions as were any other group of

workmen utilising other forms of action. Indeed, "ad hoc unionism" shared with more institutionalised unions many common characteristics. Petitioning, delegates, strikes and intimidation were all familiar weapons to eighteenth century working men. What distinguishes "ad hoc unionism" in the Dock Yard from similar activity outside, and in part from formal unionism, is the degree to which petitioning and the use of delegates was developed. Unlike civilian employees the Yard men had a single, large, permanent and well organised boss to deal with. Because of the nature of the Navy as an institution, the Yard men were able to concentrate their energies into particular ways of handling disputes. Civilian workmen had to use a wide range of instruments because they had to cope with a greater variety of situations. Whether trade unionism in the Webb sense was a viable alternative to "ad hoc unionism", either in the Yard or in certain situations outside it, must remain an open question. However, given the bias of the law against unions, it can be suggested that the more informal and ephemeral a union appeared the greater were its chances of success. Moreover, after the general Combination Acts certain aspects of "ad hoc unionism", such as the presenting of petitions, may have become more important as a way of legitimately pursuing industrial grievances. The ineffectiveness of the Combination Acts was possibly due to their failure to cope with "ad hoc unionism". Obviously, these points raise some important questions and indicate the need for much more knowledge of early trade union history. It is not that eighteenth century unions were unsophisticated and primitive, but rather that the historian's queries about them have been. (1)

- (1) What might be "ad hoc unionism" has been described in the following works :
- N. McCord. The Seamans Strike of 1815 in North East England Econ.Hist. R. XXXI (1968) pp.127-143.
- N. McCord and D.E. Brewster. Some Labour Troubles of the 1790's in North East England IRSH, Vol.XI11 (1969) pp.366-383.
- D.J. Rowe The Strikes of the Tyneside Keelmen in 1809 and 1819 IRSH XI11 (1968) p.58-75.
- C. Burns The Origins of the Labour Movement in Scotland (Strathclyde Univ. Ms Thesis 1971) p.85.
- E.P. Thompson. English Trade Unionism and other Labour Movements before 1790. The Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin 17 (1968) pp.19-24.

CHAPTER IV CRIME

Our analysis of the Yard workers has progressed to the point where we have examined their town and their workplace and where we have seen them at their tools and in dispute with their masters. Another area of activity in which the Yard workmen conflicted with their employers was the embezzlement of naval stores, to which we turn our attention after discussing the historical significance of crime. A brief analysis of smuggling allows us to compare one criminal system with another and an examination of crime and deviance generally in Portsmouth provides us with the opportunity to consider both less organised forms of criminal activity than those in the Yard, and the milieu in which the Dock Yard thief operated.

There are at least three major aspects of crime which should concern the social historian; the criminal act itself, the consequence of that act and the motive of the criminal.

The definition of a crime should pose no problems for the historian as the job has been done for him by the state. The process of definition is, of course, one of great interest, reflecting as it does the values of different groups in society and the power structure of the state. Moreover, as quantifiable facts which can be classed in a number of ways (such as crimes against property or crimes against persons) crimes can be used as measurable variables to be compared with other variables. Thus the measurement of crime may be used to generate hypothesis about the relationship between material conditions and political power and social values.

How should the historian classify crimes? The archaic legal definitions do not serve and there has been an attempt to isolate so-called

"social crimes".¹ It will serve as a useful introduction to this chapter if we consider this notion.

Logically a distinction may be drawn between the motives of a criminal and the consequences of his crime. The consequences of a crime can be two-fold. First there is the benefit to be derived from the crime. Secondly there is the reaction of society to the crime. The advantage obtained from a crime can be either material or immaterial. That is a crime need not be committed for mercenary gain: it could, for instance, be a protest against the law itself or an act of revenge. When the benefit of a crime is material it may either be realised immediately, or it may involve the criminal in an economic system through which the fruits of his crime are turned into something he desires. A poacher may eat his catch or he may sell it for cash. Further, the benefit of a crime may accrue to those immediately involved in the crime or it may advantage a larger group. Clearly crimes may have elements of all these features in their consequences. For instance, a food riot may benefit materially those who obtain cheap or free bread, it may even involve the parties in an illegal market system; yet it may also be aimed at upholding a value system which besides being "just" is supposed to offer long term material benefits for the whole of society in the form of a market free of speculators.

In theory, society may react to a crime in very many ways, ranging from universal approval or disapproval to universal indifference. In reality social reaction is likely to be far less uniform than this and different parts of society may react in different ways. Indeed, serious

¹ Distinctions between Socio-Political and other forms of Crime. Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History 25 (1972) pp 5 - 21.

conflict may arise because of incompatible social reactions to the same crime.

Perhaps of all the aspects of crime with which the historian has to deal, the motive of the criminal is the most difficult. When there is any evidence at all as to motive the historian has to judge its validity. Usually the evidence will be given after the event and will probably take two forms, an excuse or a legitimizing statement. In the first instance the criminal admits that his action is wrong but offers mitigating circumstances as an excuse. In the second case the criminal denies that his offence is a crime or that it is an offence at all. He appeals to a law higher or more valid than that of the court. In this situation the historian has to beware that the criminal really holds this opinion and is not just trying to win a mitigation of sentence, or to escape punishment by attacking the court's authority or appealing for public sympathy. The danger is that often the historian has to ascribe motive without any direct evidence on the point. It is too easy to do this by reference to some preconceived notion about the nature of crime in general, or a type of crime in particular. For instance, if it is believed that the embezzlement of material from work is a vestige of a pre-capitalist mode of production it is all too easy to attribute to the embezzler some desire to protest against the new productive techniques. The only way to avoid this situation is to see crime in its full social context.

Clearly none of the aspects of crime outlined here are inseparable and the interplay between them is complex. We need to know far more about the history of crime and criminality before any typology of crimes can be offered. Though there has been an attempt to isolate "social crime" it is clear that, in so far as all crime is social, this title is confusing. At most it refers to certain criminal activity which, it is

claimed, won the approval and support of particular social groups. It can be claimed with equal validity that those same activities were disapproved of by other groups. The task in this instance, is not to classify the crime but to examine why it was approved of and by whom and who took an opposite view. Then we must attempt to discover if the reasons for approval or disapproval were objectively valid. How was the product of a criminal distributed? Was the embezzler supported by fellow workers because he was striking a blow against the laws of the propertied or was he merely cooperating in a social and economic system that paralleled, supported and reflected a capitalist free enterprise market economy? The following chapter is an attempt to place one particular form of crime, the embezzlement of naval stores, in its social context, and in doing so to answer some queries we have raised above.

The embezzlement of naval stores was so universal and well organised as to constitute a criminal social system which extended as far as to include parts of the machinery of justice. The existence of such a system is demonstrated by: first, an examination of the administrative and legislative response of the Government to embezzlement from the Dock Yards; secondly, by considering the criminals and their methods; and thirdly, by looking at the courts which dealt with cases arising from the theft of naval stores.

We will show that there was much concern over the theft of Government stores and that Government employees were held in general suspicion. Moreover, within the Dock Yard the authorities regarded particular occupational groups, especially the semi and unskilled, as being more prone to crime than others. In general, both these points of view were probably well founded. Though it is impossible to provide statistical proof, the overwhelming impression from the sources is that the majority of Dock Yard employees were involved in thefts from the Yard. Admittedly, much of this activity was casual petty pilfering, but the record of detected crime would suggest that certain groups, such as the ropemakers and riggers, were involved in embezzlement more regularly than others. The frauds perpetrated by the contractors, Dock Yard Officers and clerks are not dealt with in this context, though there was wide-spread contemporary concern about these "white collar" crimes. A Chief Clerk in Portsmouth complained:

"The Clerks of His Majesty's Dockyards have ever been the object of unmerited public censure. Envious and malignant people form in their own minds what possible abuses may be committed and from that source the propagation of mere suspicion assumes the semblance of truth and a few deviations from rectitude which (such is the state of human nature) will occur in all considerable bodies implicates in the eye of prejudice the whole."¹

¹ PRO ADM 106 5126.

The particular concern of this study is the unauthorised removal of stores from vessels and the Dock Yard, mainly by seamen and Yard workers but with some civilian participation. Even in these activities there was a suspicion of the involvement of Dock Yard Officers, Patrick Colquhoun cited the reply of a storekeeper to a report, by a J.P., of a case of theft: "Damn it", the Justice was told, "mind your own business. Such things have always been done and will continue in spite of you or me: it will at any rate last our time."¹ This quotation suggests that some junior officers at a local level tolerated, at least, the theft of government stores. The central authorities, in particular the Navy Board, took a rather more stringent view. The period with which we are concerned saw the enactment of a statute expressly dealing with the problem.

It has been said that the eighteenth century was the age when practically the entire law of theft was made.² One particular offence, embezzlement, attracted growing attention. Despite its modern and popular meaning as financial malversation, embezzlement in the eighteenth century meant the theft of goods or money received by a servant of an employee from a third person on behalf of his master. Generally such offences were a civil breach of trust.³ However, as capitalist financial and industrial institutions developed certain exceptions to this rule were created as courts and legislature sought to reduce its scope. Statutes against embezzlement were of several sorts. The first were those concerned with protecting state organizations such as the armed forces and the post office. The second were concerned with national institutions

¹ P. Colquhoun A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis 3rd edn. London (1796) p.82

² J. Hall Theft Law and Society, Indianapolis (1955) p.VIII

³ Ibid. p.37

like the Bank of England and the Southsea Company. The third type of laws were framed to protect those industries and trades in which customary rights over waste materials were common, such as hatting and weaving. In 1799 a more general embezzlement statute was passed. Among the earliest of these various Acts was one of Elizabeth for the prosecution of the embezzlers of military munitions. Parliament continued to show sporadic concern about protecting government stores and by 1793 had passed four statutes relevant to the subject. These were: 22 Car. 2 c.5, 9 & 10 William 3 c.41, 9 Geo. 1 c.8 and 17 Geo.2 c.40, the "Black Act" of 1827:1724. Under these laws it was a capital felony, without benefit of clergy, to steal the King's stores. Possession could be punished by whipping, pillorying, six or three months in gaol, or a £200 fine, all of which sentences could be mitigated by the judge or magistrate. By the Act of 22 Car. II c.2 the Principal Commissioners of the Navy were authorised, when the value of the goods involved was less than twenty shillings, to issue warrants to search for stolen stores and to punish offenders by a fine or imprisonment. The Commissioners' powers were further extended by the statute 9 Geo. I c.8.¹ However, these provisions proved inadequate. A year after the general embezzlement Act of 1799 the preamble of another statute stated,

"... notwithstanding the penalties and punishments inflicted ... the stealers, embezzlers and receivers of His Majesty's warlike and naval ordnance and victualling stores have greatly increased, so that it is become necessary to make some further and more effectual provision for preventing their wicked practices in future."

This statute, 39 & 40 Geo.1 c.89, created a number of new offences. It became punishable by fourteen years transportation to receive, possess

¹ P. Colquhoun op.cit.

or sell stores with the King's mark on them without an official certificate of sale. Further, the falsifying of such certificates was to be punished by shipping, imprisonment or a fine. Thirdly, it was made a felony to deface or remove the marks that distinguished the King's stores. In addition it became a misdemeanour punishable by fine to be in possession without a good excuse, of unmarked but suspected stores. Such stores, and stolen ones, were liable to forfeiture as was any vessel on which they might be found.

To enforce the Act and to detect stolen stores the legal powers of the Commissioners of the Navy were restated and extended. Commissioners could give a search warrant to "... any police officer, constable, headborough or other peace officer", and deputise any person to stop, search and detain vessels suspected of carrying stolen stores and to arrest suspected thieves, possessors and receivers of embezzled goods. Under the Act, the Commissioners could try misdemeanours and punish offenders by a fine, enforcing payment by issuing warrants of distress, or imposing a sentence of three months imprisonment. There was no appeal against the Commissioner's verdict:

"... such convictions shall not be set aside or quashed for want of form, not be liable to be removed by certiorari, advocacy or suspension into any other court, but shall be deemed and taken to be final to all intents and purposes what so ever."

Moreover, the Commissioners could try all cases of stealing, receiving and possessing King's stores under the value of twenty shillings, taking sworn evidence from witnesses, of whom only one was needed for a conviction. The punishment was a fine of up to £10 or a three month gaol sentence in a house of correction. In these cases appeal could be made to the Quarter Sessions. Witnesses who failed to appear before a

Commissioner could be fined and if they lied they committed perjury punishable by law. In carrying out these powers the Commissioners were protected from vexatious legal suits in the same manner as J.P.s. Those executing Commissioners' warrants were similarly protected. Justices could not summarily try any case under the Act without the written permission of a Naval Commissioner. A system of rewards for information that led to a successful prosecution was also created, so that, in all this was an impressive piece of legislation calling to mind parallels with the laws against smuggling.

It is difficult to make a precise comparison between the law against contraband running and that against Naval embezzlers because there were something like three hundred and eighty seven statutes concerned with smuggling. It has only been possible to assess the nature of these statutes in general terms using secondary sources.¹ If anything, it would seem that the Commissioners of the Customs were more restricted in their powers than were those of the Navy. For instance, though the former had extensive powers of search based on the right to issue writs of assistance, they relied heavily on the cooperation of J.P.s and the Secretaries of State in arresting and committing suspects to jail. Nor do the Customs appear to have enjoyed the powers of trial that the Navy Commissioners had. The fact that nearly every Dock Yard had a Resident Commissioner while the Customs Commissioners sat in London made the authority of the former more geographically widespread than the latter.

In fact, in its anxiety to protect Naval stores, Parliament went further than it intended. In 1803 the Lord Chancellor moved an amendment

¹ E.E. Hoon The Organization of the English Customs System 1696 - 1786 (Newton Abbot 1968).

to the Act of 1800 removing the power of the Commissioners to compel a witness to give evidence which under common law they might legally refuse to do.¹

In many ways the Act 39 & 40 Geo.3 c.89 is an exceptional piece of legislation and in 1815 it was extended to cover all government stores. It is therefore worth considering the origins of the Act.²

There are noticeable similarities between the naval embezzlement Act and a draft bill drawn up by Patrick Colquhoun and published in his *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*. For example, Colquhoun's proposals relating to a system of rewards for informers, the introduction of transportation and punishment for the defacement of the King's mark all find a place in the Act.³ Colquhoun also suggested that the copper trade should be closely regulated in all Dock Yard towns and in 1801 the Navy Board were said to be considering this idea.⁴ In addition, the London magistrate proposed a special Dock Yard police. Furthermore, in his *Treatise on the River Thames*, Colquhoun claimed that he was currently engaged in drawing up a plan to prevent "Frauds, Plunder and Embezzlement" of Dock Yard stores. He quoted a letter from Charles Bicknell, the Admiralty's Solicitor, saying that the Navy Board intended to consult him on the problem.

Colquhoun was but one of a number of people concerned in the 1790's with the problem of police. In Portsmouth a Mr. J.C. Mottley, Tide Surveyor of Customs, proposed a system of his own.⁵

¹ *Naval Chronicle* 9 (1803) p.66.

² 55 Geo III c 77

³ P. Colquhoun *op.cit.* pp 84-86.

⁴ *Naval Chronicle* (1801) p.242

⁵ Customs 58/20 10.4.1790.

Mottley had been appointed to his Customs' post in 1790 after being apprenticed to a hairdresser, acting as a shopman to a Bookseller and stationer and later working as a clerk to the town's coach and waggon office. Doubts were raised as to Mottley's suitability for his post, which involved managing a boat and rummaging vessels, but he was said to be honest. J.C. Mottley remained as Tide Surveyor for nine years, after which he resigned in order to engage in the timber trade.¹ His successor was apparently his son Thomas Mottley, a bookseller.² In 1797 Mottley senior responded to a charge to the Assize Grand Jury which recommended the jurymen to give consideration to forming a plan to prevent thefts from the Dock Yard. The Supervisor of Revenue officers and the Deputy Comptroller of Customs in Portsmouth wrote to the Customs Board in London informing them that Mr. Mottley had submitted a scheme to the Admiralty for:

"Effectually to check and put an end to the Embezzlement of King's Stores at this Port, which there is reason to believe is carried on at present to a very great extent many which depredations Mr. Mottley has very laudably detected, and on his Evidence the parties have been convicted and that of his Boats Crew at the Assizes for the County."

The local Customs Officers gave their approval of Mottley's plan and agreed that it would not interfere with his other duties.³ Mottley sent a summary of his ideas:

"... the principle of my plan is to have authority from the Admiralty to rummage vessels immediately employed under their Lordships and to seize any stolen store I find in the act of Embezzlement. I having a private information of the manner in which the Trade is mostly carried on ... by a little extra exertion of myself and Boats crew I am persuaded I shall be able very much to serve the Country by the total abolition of the iniquitous trade at the Port."⁴

The Admiralty took up Mottley's plan "... for annihilating the Embezzlement of King's Stores", and six men and a boat were put at his

1 Customs 58/32 9.2.1799
 2 Customs 58/32 12.2.1799
 3 Customs 58/30 6.4.1797
 4 Customs 58/30 21.4.1797

disposal. Commissioner Saxton soon had cause to pay tribute to Mottley's "... great exertions and diligence".¹ The "Inspector to Prevent Embezzlement in Portsmouth Dock Yard", as Mottley was called, and his crew, appear to have been independent of normal Dock Yard authority. The post is not mentioned in the First and Second Reports of the Commissioners of Revision, which contain instructions to all Yard Officers; while a special quarterly warrant from the Navy Board was needed to authorize the Clerk of the Cheque to pay the Inspector's men. Probably Mottley and his crew were still under the authority of the Customs. The Boat Crew's wages were £30 per annum including a victualling allowance. After the first few months, during which he had presented certificates of diligence from the magistrates of Gosport and Portsmouth, Mottley was paid automatically. His "police force" continued operating until 1813.²

The success of the scheme in Portsmouth appears to have inspired similar arrangements in Plymouth where two Tide Surveyors were appointed "Inspectors of Stores upon the Water". But these appointments only lasted two or three years as the officers failed to make any seizures.³ It would also seem that the Navy Board's experience with Mottley was reflected in the Act of 1800. The deputising of persons to search for and seize stores is clearly related to Mottley's activities. Mottley's appointment and the Act of 1799 were the only important innovations in Dock Yard security during this period. Even these changes appear to have been of limited effectiveness, as there is nothing to suggest that either Mottley's activities or the Commissioner's new powers had a profound effect on criminal activity.

¹ N.M.M. POR/G/1 31.7.1798

² N.M.M. POR/C/27 21.10.1813

³ P.R.O. ADM/106/ 1768 5.1.1818

A local man not directly employed in the Dock Yard, but closely involved in attempts to deal with thefts, was a solicitor, Mr. Greetham. As the local agent of the Admiralty's Solicitor he had the responsibility of laying informations against offenders and managing cases tried at the Quarter Sessions and the Assizes in the locality.¹ The success of the Naval authorities against Dock Yard thieves would have depended greatly on the energies and ability of these local agents. Mr. Greetham appears to have been very active; his and Mottley's name occur frequently in the records and they maintained close liaison with the Resident Commissioner.

In many ways the internal security arrangements of the Dock Yard resembled those of a modern industrial plant with a porter's lodge, visitor's book, key board and a system of watchmen. But the military played a role which made a considerable difference. Most of the guard duties performed by the military appear to have been carried out by the Militia, though occasionally Marines and, in times of emergency, Dock Yard Volunteers were used.²

Until 1801 the main duties of the army were to make nightly patrols of the Yard and to guard the exterior of the Yard wall. It seems clear from the sources, that the soldiers' chief function was not to prevent surprise attacks by the enemy, but to supplement and even police the civil watch. In 1801 there was a subaltern's guard of forty men and thirty eight watch posts.³

Relations between the military and the Dock Yard officers and workmen were at times strained. For instance, in 1793 Commissioner Saxton went so far as to say that if the troops guarding the Dock Yard continued to

¹ The reports of the local Agents and the papers of the Admiralty's Solicitor form an interesting source of information not only on thefts but also on naval contracts, combinations, and the like.

² Hants. Tel. 7.9.1801.

³ PRO ADM 227 224 1801.

be frequently changed without reference to him, he would consider it:

"... my duty not to open the gates to strange Troops before I am duly informed who they are or have their Lordships (ie the Lords of the Admiralty) instructions on that head ..."1

The military indulged in some rather dubious practices. On one occasion, explaining why he had refused to reward some militiamen for apprehending a thief, Saxton said that in the past soldiers and marines had formed

"... combinations and practices by firing their muskets and creating false alarms in the night pretending every now and then the People were entering into endeavouring to Escape over the walls etc. in order to obtain gratuities and recompense."2

As the Resident Commissioner and senior officials lived in the Yard with their families they could hardly have welcomed such disturbances.

Both Commissioner Saxton and his successor George Grey, feared that the military might be a source of disorder and confusion and resisted proposals from the Admiralty that the army should completely replace the civilian night watch. Saxton warned that if this was done, "... we shall be in constant anarchy and confusion..."3 His view, that it was important to have men on watch who were familiar with the workings of the Yard, was shared by Commissioner Grey, who wrote:

"I am confident that the Soldiers, from not being able to discriminate between the People of the Yard, Strangers and Seamen would often retard the service in drawing stores from the different cabins and in some instances cause confusion."4

The Admiralty, however, had rather greater doubts about the efficacy of the watch than did their local subordinates. Some of the hostility between Yard workers and the military may have arisen from friction between

1 N.M.M. POR/F/21 1.7.1793
 2 N.M.M. POR/F/21 25.4.1796
 3 N.M.M. POR/H/16 2.1.1803
 4 N.M.M. POR/F/28 25.11.1807

the watch and the guard, who frequently reported negligent watchmen and sometimes removed their arms as proof of the charges. The Lords of the Admiralty made several attempts to replace the civil watch by a purely military guard. In 1801 they first ordered that every watchman be accompanied by a military sentinel.¹ Then, a month later, they apparently decided that the watch should be abolished altogether.

"We find the depredations at night upon the stores of His Majesty's Dock Yards are much more frequent than they used to be and that little or no dependence can be had upon the Watchmen belonging to the Yards."²

However, it would seem that the military were unable to provide enough men for this duty. It was estimated that seven hundred and fifty six troops would be needed to guard Portsmouth Yard.³ Undeterred, the Admiralty tried again to abolish the watch in 1803, ordering that the civilian watchmen be discharged.⁴ Nevertheless the watch seems to have survived as the main means of securing the Yard and the Second Report of the Commissioners for Revising the Navy contains close instructions on this point.⁵

Each civilian watchman stood one of the three watches into which the night was divided, though at one time there were only two watches. The watchman had to strike a bell every quarter of an hour.⁶ Sleeping boxes and a guard room were provided for men on duty. For protection against bad weather the men shared one great coat between three, though they were also obliged to buy extra clothing, the expense of which they complained about.⁷

¹ N.M.M. POR/A/1 12.5.1801

² PRO ADM 2227 8.4.1801

³ PRO ADM 2228 1.7.1801

⁴ N.M.M. POR/G/1 1.2.1803

⁵ PP 18 106(92) V p.25

⁶ PP 1806 (92) V 245 op.cit.

⁷ N.M.M. POR/A/49 5.6.1808.

Recruited from the Yard Labourers and scavelmen, the watchmen could earn a shilling a night, averaging two and sixpence a week. Eden in The State of the Poor mentions this as an important supplement to the income of Portsmouth Dock Yard labourers.¹

The distinction made in the records between settled, occasional and extra watchmen is a little confusing. It would seem that the settled watchmen were the regular force, any temporary vacancies in their ranks being filled from among the occasional watchmen, who had to muster every evening with the settled watch; these men were supplemented as needed from the extra watch.

The watch system was open to a number of criticisms. As the watchmen were allowed to leave the Yard early, it was claimed that for every man employed in the watch the Navy lost two hours labour a day.² Moreover, it was common for men to miss their muster or to come to it drunk and incapable of doing duty. Similar offences, such as falling asleep or failing to ring the bell, fill the pages of the Resident Commissioner's Warrant Book. In 1807 watchmen were ordered to remove seats and hammocks from their boxes.³ Another common offence was for watchmen to provide substitutes or to hire out their watches without permission. The same offenders were repeatedly fined from one shilling to two and six for these various misdemeanours. However, it was rare for a man to be discharged as was Robert Foster, reported as being frequently absent from watch, "... which he treats with great indifference." In fact, abuses became so frequent that the Resident Commissioner ordered that only the most serious cases were to be reported to him.⁴ Commissioner Grey tried to tighten up

¹ F. Eden The State of the Poor op.cit. p.226.

² N.M.M. POR/G/1 18.1.1803

³ N.M.M. POR/C/25 29.8.1807

⁴ N.M.M. POR/C/24 30.1.1800

discipline by increasing fines, but absenteeism continued. As the Admiralty recognised, the efficiency of the Dock Yard watch left a great deal to be desired and slighting comments were also sometimes made about the honesty of its members. It is therefore interesting to note that in the years 1793 to 1815 only ten watchmen were discharged for theft or suspicion of it. As several of these cases might be more fairly regarded as negligence, the accusation of criminality cannot be supported even if that of slackness can.¹

Every Dock Yard Officer took charge of the Dock Yard in rotation, though after vigorous protests the Surgeon was excused. A ship's officer acted as lieutenant of the watch, which was completed by the rounders. Their duties, as specified in the Second report, were to set the watch, patrol the Yard and to see that visitors had a proper escort and that they left the Yard. The rounders were to be recruited from the most trustworthy of the shipwrights and caulkers.

During the day the security of the Yard was the responsibility of the Warden and warders. Until 1801 the Warden, or Porter as he was then called, not only had the duty of looking after the Yard gate but also the privilege of keeping the Yard taphouse, which in Portsmouth was said to be worth between five hundred and a thousand pounds a year. One of St. Vincent's reforms as First Lord of the Admiralty was to carry out the recommendation of the Commissioners on Fees and perquisites and appoint an official tapster.² St. Vincent also raised the status of the Porter's office, but renamed the post, increasing the stipend to sixty pounds and expressing the intention of appointing only Naval lieutenants to the post. The Warden

¹ For example, a scavelman and a labourer were discharged for allowing lead to be cut from a roof quite close to their watch boxes. N.M.M. POR/C/24 4.2.1799.

² PP 1806 (309) VII op.cit.

had to inspect the warders at their stations and was responsible for holding in custody all suspicious characters. His general duties ceased when the workmen left the Yard, though he would appear to have been responsible for the gate until it was locked and the key handed over to the lieutenant of the watch in the guard house. A proposal, in 1805, to put the key in the charge of the military guard brought forth yet another adverse comment about the army from Saxton.¹

The duties of the warders were similar to those of the civil watch. They were also recruited from the Yard labourers and scavellers, but were employed fulltime. Men were posted at the gate, at special stations and patrolled prescribed beats. They were mustered before the main workforce arrived in the morning and they had to remain in the Yard ten minutes after it had left. They were also responsible for ensuring that nobody landed in the Yard without authority, including the crews of ships' boats.² Seamen were only allowed in the Dock Yard in closely supervised work-parties, probably as much to prevent desertion as theft. Presumably, at other times sailors had to land and embark at the common hard and the camber. Entry and exit from the Yard was via one gate and the warders there were responsible for checking all those who wished to pass. They were therefore very important in trying to prevent thefts. This importance received formal acknowledgement in the sixpence extra a day paid to those warders stationed at the gate, one of whom had to do duty with the night watch. When a temporary gate was opened in order to expedite some construction work, the warders there were given the same pay as those at the main gate so as to ensure their close attention to the traffic passing through.³

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/47 3.10.1805

² P.P. 1806 (92) V 245 op.cit.

³ N.M.M. POR/F/22 29.9.1796

A comment by Commissioner Saxton gives some idea of the difficulties of their task,

"... it is well known to be the daily practice of those residing without as well as those employed within the Dockyard to surprise and cheat the Porter and Warders in charge of the same, (i.e. the gate), at every possible opportunity."¹

At times the warders at the gate may have been assisted by the military, but the latter's role would appear to have been restricted to searching carts. Under the direction of a Dock Yard Officer, one of whom was supposed to attend the gate whenever the men came to or left work, the warders had to apprehend and search suspects. They had also to keep a particularly close watch on the wives and children of Yard workers, who were allowed in to bring the men their meals. Being prominent in trying to prevent embezzlement, the warders were sometimes illtreated by other workmen, abused and occasionally subjected to violence. Temporary warders, paid at special rates, were appointed from among the shipwrights to guard ships under construction.

For all their onerous duties the warders received little thanks either in terms of money or status. Watchmen and warders were never given rewards for preventing thefts and ~~because~~ their ordinary wages were less than those of labourers or scavemen because they lacked the opportunity of working "extra". In 1793 Saxton complained that no "especially promising characters" were forth coming for the post. He later recommended that, "... as the Trust and duty of warding requires Men of good Character who can give security & are well acquainted with the Yard",² warders day pay should be raised to two shillings. This was not done until 1802 when it could still be said that watchmen and warders were "Inefficient persons". The Navy

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/24 6.12.1801

² N.M.M. POR/D/27 6.12.1796

Board also ordered that in future warders were to be selected only from workmen whose length of service provided an opportunity for their characters to be known. A year later the Admiralty was proposing to sack them all.¹ Despite this, the warders were expected to maintain a high level of honesty and efficiency. One warder caught stealing was sent to Winchester Assizes, "as an object who deserves a stronger example to be made of him than the ordinary."² Another warder was discharged for allowing a prisoner to escape, though it was a second offence and there may have been some suspicion of bribery. Another was demoted for allowing a workman to go out of the Yard without the knowledge of his superiors.³

Despite his extensive powers under the 1800 Act, the Resident Commissioner's authority to deal with thefts from the Dock Yard was limited outside the Yard's precinct. In order to overcome this, the Navy Board considered, in 1809, having the Yard warders sworn in by the local magistrates as special constables. However, the Town's Corporation was opposed to this and they wrote to tell the Commissioner that the Navy, "... never had seen reason to complain of want of assistance from the police here". Three Borough constables, always resided near the Dock Yard gate.⁴ In the face of this attitude, and the realization that the warders would be liable to other duties if they were made constables, the Navy Board dropped the idea, despite the fact that they had evidence of the inadequacy of the local peace officers. In 1805 the Dock Yard authorities had indicted a constable at the Quarter Sessions for allowing a prisoner to escape. The court decided it was only a case of negligence and the officer was fined five pounds.⁵

1 N.M.M. POR/H/16 2.1.1803
 2 N.M.M. POR/F/22 13.11.1796
 3 N.M.M. POR/C/24 19.6.1799
 4 N.M.M. POR/D/28 25.4.1809
 5 P.R.O. ADM. 106 1764 15.10.1805

It is difficult to determine how often the Resident Commissioner used his powers to issue search warrants because of the confusion between searches carried out by the Dock Yard and those connected with the Customs Service. Mr. Mottley's dual role as customs man and Dock Yard detective increases this perplexity. Other revenue officers also played a part in detecting the thieves and receivers of naval stores. There is no evidence to suggest that this co-operation had any official basis. It may be that it was undertaken by individuals in the hope of reward, or like Mottley before his appointment by the Admiralty, through honest endeavour. There was, in fact, considerable cooperation between the Navy and the Customs in several respects and this is considered below.¹

On a few occasions the Dock Yard had the services of an officer from Bow Street, either to make enquiries near London or, as in 1816 when the Yard Pay Office was rifled, in the Yard itself.²

Clearly the Navy Board had considerable problems trying to prevent and to detect thefts from the Dock Yards and it tried to supplement its police facilities by publicising the cases in which it was successful. Warning notices in the local press and posters gave details of the conviction of Dock Yard thieves, including particularly heavy sentences imposed elsewhere. The Act of 1800, 39 & 40 Geo.3 c.89, was displayed in prominent places. The Yards also operated a blacklist, notifying each other of the names and description of the more serious offenders.³

The formal arrangements for the prevention and detection of Dock Yard-related crime were extensive, including a legislative code, a judicial system and a system of preventative police, as well as some agencies for

¹ See p. 477

² P.R.O. ADM 1765 13.2.1805
N.M.M. POR/D/31 31.1.1816

³ See for example a civilian contractor blacklisted NMM P/G/4 26.1.1814.

detection. In addition there were many minor regulations, such as those about dress, specific to particular circumstances and occupations.

In all, considering the contemporary hostility to any form of police, the Navy's attempt to prevent embezzlement from the Dock Yards is quite remarkable. Yard workers, because of their employment, were probably among the most heavily policed citizens in England, and, though the civil authorities were no stronger than elsewhere, the powers of the Commissioners of the Navy and Customs extended into the town. The reason that the Navy did not meet with general resistance to its activities in this field is probably three-fold. First, the people affected were a specific and fairly well defined group, secondly, the crime associated with the Yards was a matter of public notoriety and involved public monies raised by taxes. Thirdly, many of the Navy's police arrangements were a matter of administration, hidden from general view within the Yards. Even so, the Government was unable to establish a regular Dock Police force and magistracy modelled on the Thames River Police. A bill attempting to do so never got past the initial stages of Commons procedure.¹

Despite their complexity and scope it is difficult to say how effective the security arrangements of the Dock Yard were. Probably the Yard watchmen and wardens operated most successfully against petty pilferers. The detection of more organised activity and criminals who worked from outside the Yard, posed a great problem. Without a doubt, however, the fact that the Dock Yard did have the means to prevent and detect thefts must have safeguarded Government stores from even greater losses than those that took place.

¹ Cobbetts Parliamentary Register 1808-09.

Though Dock Yard embezzlement raises some interesting points with regard to the nature of eighteenth century policing, it also provides a number of insights into the nature of criminal activity by raising the questions who stole what and how?

Put in such terse terms, the above questions hide a number of analytical problems. Obviously, the only information available on crime is based on known incidents and our knowledge of criminals comes from the history of those who were caught. Our problem is whether detection of criminal activity can be regarded as a random process giving a sample on which it is safe to base generalisations, or whether some hidden bias exists. It is impossible to say what percentage of all Dock Yard crime and criminals is represented by cases recorded, as there is no way of assessing the overall level of crime. Therefore, any approach to this question must be subject to qualification.

Further, there is the problem that questions of the nature "how" have as their natural corollary the question "why" and the answers to these have far reaching implications. For instance, if our analysis indicates that known criminality was strongly correlated with unskilled or low paid work (as was the case) then the importance of wages or income differentials and occupational status becomes clear. There are, besides, relatively simple considerations such as the opportunity to steal.

An analysis of every known case of the theft or the possession of naval stores over a period of twenty-three years is given in Table 4.1.¹ One measure of how good a sample this is, is to compare it with what was said by the Dock Yard authorities about thieves who stole from the Yard. However, this test has a major weakness, for it is possible that the

¹ Sources include local newspapers, Dock Yard and Navy Board records and Quarter Session and Assize papers, which are cited in detail below.

authorities' views were based on the very material we are trying to assess. Richard Cobb has warned:

"Evidence from police sources reveals much more about the attitudes and assumptions of the repressive authorities than it does about popular attitudes and motivations."¹

We could do well to bear this comment about the French police and revolutionary movements in mind when we consider evidence about other forms of deviant activity. It is possible that the Naval authorities operated against Dock Yard crime with a mental portrait of the thief, based on past experience, but not necessarily either true or reflecting a changing situation. Thus, we must be cautious when we discover that the riggers head the criminality poll and that the Commissioner of the Dock Yard found this occupational group suspect. Saxton wrote of the riggers: "... I have long considered this class of people among the most daring of all pillagers in the Dock Yard."² In 1808 Commissioner Grey ordered that, "in consequence of the very great Embezzlement (which they) continually carry on in the Rigging loft ...", every rigger was to be searched by the Master Rigger and the foremen before leaving work.³ The riggers were also subject to special dress regulations, being forbidden to wear their "frocks" as they left work and ordered to leave them in the rigging loft.⁴

The speciality of the riggers would appear to have been large-scale thefts using their workgangs and boats, though the authorities were constantly trying to prevent all workmen from bringing their own craft into the Yard.⁵ One theft carried out by the riggers involved no less than nineteen men and two or three hundred weight of rope, "... not one of them will acknowledge to have either seen or know of anything of the

¹ R. Cobb The Police and the People (Oxford 1972) p.26.

² N.M.M. POR/F/24 29.3.1801.

³ N.M.M. POR/C/ 23.11.1808.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/G/1 20.1.1798.

⁵ The work of the riggers is described elsewhere, see p.193

stores ..", complained Saxton. He ordered that the men involved should all be discharged, "... in the hope that some one among them will be found that will not sacrifice his bread but will come forward to save himself".¹ This policy had worked the previous year when out of nine riggers and riggers labourers, discharged for stealing, three had turned King's evidence and were re-entered in the Yard.² Informing, however, could have dangerous results for the individuals concerned. One riggers labourer who, as the outcome of a quarrel, had informed against a leading man of riggers was driven out of the Yard and stoned. The informer found it expedient to request his own discharge after causing the dismissal of his assailants by identifying them to the Yard Officers.³

The apparent group solidarity of the riggers may, in part, be explained by the fact that many of them were seamen. There also appears to have been a considerable mobility between the ranks of rigger and rigger's labourer. Several of those riggers discharged for theft had been promoted from labourers. The gangs involved in thefts contained both riggers and labourers, one even involved a rigger who was acting as watchman.⁴

Little can be said of the next group, the unidentified thieves, except that five of these men were Yard employees, though their exact occupations cannot be determined. However, as most of the names in this group came from newspaper accounts and were not mentioned in Dock Yard records, it was likely that they were civilians.

Leaving the civilians to be considered later, the labourers and scavemen can be taken together. Of the labourers, sixty were simply

1 N.M.M. POR/F/24 6.3.1802
 2 N.M.M. POR/C/24 12.1.1801
 3 N.M.M. POR/F/23 27.12.1797
 N.M.M. POR/C/24 27.12.1797
 4 N.M.M. POR/C/24 9.3.1807

Table 4.1The Occupation of the Thieves and Receivers of Naval
Stores in Portsmouth. 1793 - 1816

		Thieves etc. % of those employed in the Dock Yard
Riggers	92	27
Unknown	88	-
Labourers	84	25
Civilians	62	-
Scavellers	43	12.5
Shipwrights	34	10.5
Seamen	32	-
Ropemakers	27	8
Watchmen	10	3
House-Carpenters	7	2.5
Sawyers	5	1.5
Other Yard Employees	34	10.5
Total	518	336

called labourers, twenty were denominated bricklayers' labourers and there was one plumber's labourer. It must also be remembered that the watchmen were scavemen and labourers.

Storehouse labourers had the greatest opportunity for stealing, but they had to pay a fifty pound bond. Also, fees and gifts from contractors gave them an alternative supplement to their income. The scavemen were paid at a slightly higher rate than ordinary labourers, but their duties around the docks gave them many opportunities for stealing copper and other valuable stores. In general, the thieves from this group, labourers, tended to steal a wide variety of things, reflecting their diverse duties and to operate alone, which may indicate a workgroup with a high labour turnover and many transients.

If the figures in Table 4.1 could be altered to give weight to the numbers of each class of workmen employed in the Yard, some differences would appear, the most striking of which, besides further increasing the dominance of the riggers, would concern the shipwrights. Composing one third of the Yard workforce the shipwrights would rank lower than the midway position they hold on Table 4.1 with a 10% share of detected crime. The shipwrights were socially and economically superior to many of the other Yard employees.¹ However, we must once more beware of stereotyping. When one shipwright was caught taking copper, it was regarded as a serious case and all the other Yards were informed. The Commissioner remarked that the man "... should from his situation and pay be shamed, out of his guilt of pilfering."² In contrast to this view, one writer castigated

¹ See p.153

² N.M.M. POR/F/25 21.1.1803.

the shipwrights as thieves for replacing the copperbolts, which held a ship together, with ones of wood known as Devil Bolts.¹ Copper bolts were a favourite item with thieves, as they were of high value; the shipwrights had the easiest access to them.² The reputation of shipwrights as criminals has even been made the subject of a poem by Kipling, King Henry VII's Shipwrights.³

If the shipwrights did steal naval stores to any large extent they did so without detection. Even of those who were caught, nine were only apprentices, a group whose economic condition could at times be one of the worst in the Yard.⁴ In this respect it is noteworthy that of these young men and boys three were involved with a gang of housebreakers which also included a Dock Yard smith and labourer.

The next group to be examined is a rather mixed one, consisting of seamen in the service of the Navy on ships in ordinary, Dock Yard craft and hired transports. A number of those in this category were warrant officers, and the masters of vessels and their crews. One theft is of particular interest, as it led to the dismissal of a boatswain, the principal in the affair together with a foreman of labourers, three riggers and a labourer in charge of a storage lot.⁵ Another theft resulted in the discharge of the master of a transport ship and all his crew, while the vessel's owner had to reimburse the Navy for the loss of the stores.⁶ If stolen stores were found on a vessel, then the master was automatically suspect. As Mr. Greetham said, "I have known frequent Convictions of Masters of Vessels who were not abroad at the Time the Stores were found, but were still expected to give a satisfactory account of their being

1 E.P. Brenton Life and Correspondence of John Earl of St. Vincent II (1838) pp 159-160

2 See 167

3 R. Kipling, Rewards and Fairies (1910) King Henry VIII's Shipwrights.

4 See p.

5 N.M.M. POR/C/24 8.2.1800

6 N.M.M. POR/C/23 22.1.14.

there".¹

In 1793 it was ordered that all vessels and transports lying in the Dock Yard camber were to be searched before leaving.² This was reiterated by Commissioner Grey in 1808:

"Where as it appears there has been a great deal of Embezzlement carried on by the People belonging to the hired craft in the service of the Dockyard you are therefore hereby directed and required in future not to suffer any Boats belonging to the Hired Craft or Merchantmen which may be loading or unloading at the Dockyard to go out of the Camber at anytime without being searched."³

Regulating the ships laid up in harbour was more difficult, especially if the warrant officers were dishonest or lax.⁴ Only spot checks and patrols by boats had any effect and these were the main concern of Mr. Mottley. Thefts from the ships in commission are not considered here. Though naval seamen were arrested in the Yard and a careful watch was kept for them, they were usually trying to desert. Generally, however, seamen had a reputation for disorder. Commissioner Saxton reminded the Navy Board that local farmers and gentry had petitioned against the use of sailors in working parties ashore because of the "... irregularities and depredations they would be likely to commit in the country."⁵ Sailors were also ready to commit other infamies, such as withholding part of their families' remittances, "... in which they find ready instructors among the inhabitants and slopsellers of this place".⁶

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/26 8.10.1808

² N.M.M. POR/C/23 9.2.1793

³ N.M.M. POR/C/26 16.4.1808

⁴ Certain of the warrant officers, the Gunner, Carpenter and Boatswain, were Standing Officers. They stayed with their ship even when it went into Ordinary. Of these the Boatswains were notorious for their thieving habits. Admiral Duncan is said to have remarked to his Boatswain 'Whatever you do Mr Bono I hope and trust you will not take the anchors from the bows'. Recollections of J.A. Gardiner (Navy Records Society Vol XXXI) p.70. See also M. Lewis A Social History of the Navy (London 1960) pp 264-265.

⁵ N.M.M. POR/F/21 3.4.1794

⁶ N.M.M. POR/F/23 1.6.1797

An incident of 1803 indicates something of the attitude towards theft of the ropemakers, the next occupational group to be considered. About fifty ropemakers tried to push through the gate together. A number were stopped and found to be carrying large quantities of hemp, which led the Navy Board to consider prosecuting all the men in the crowd for conspiracy.¹ The plunder of this trade group was mainly hemp, yarn or rope, formed into pads and wrapped around their limbs and bodies; hence the regulation that forbade ropemakers wearing greatcoats or long trousers. It would seem that the ropemakers were searched before they left the ropehouse, and the Commission of Revision recommended that they should always be accompanied from their work to the gate by a Rope Yard Officer.

Of the remaining groups, caulkers, sawyers, etc., there is little to say except that nearly every class of workmen in the Yard is represented and that if the watchmen are treated as labourers, the house carpenters are the largest single trade included.

The sawyers shared with the labourers the "perk" of carrying out of the Yard sawdust and woodshavings. This served as a cover for stolen goods, but by 1798 Saxton thought that this problem had been overcome, presumably by closer supervision of the men.

Chips were another traditional perquisite, more widespread than any other and leading to greater abuses. It was the right of nearly all Yard workers to carry out of the Yard short lengths of unusable timber chips. Perhaps even more valued than the wood was the means this practice presented for smuggling items through the gate. Colquhoun claimed that

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/26 16.12.1803
N.M.M. POR/G/2 17.2.1803

Table 4.2 The Status of thieves employed in the Dock Yard
(not including Riggers and Seamen).

Skilled workmen	75
Unskilled workmen	135
Foremen etc.	5
Apprentices	17
Boys	9

it also brought women and children into the Yard to collect the bundles of timber.¹

It seems clear that Dock Yard crime had, in general, an occupational basis. The semi- and unskilled were more frequently detected than other groups and may have had a higher propensity for crime (see Table 4.2). Moreover, criminal gangs were formed along occupational lines and they tended, as did individuals, to steal the materials they worked with. In terms of numbers and occupational groups, criminal behaviour was widespread among the employees of the Dock Yard. This conclusion is supported by both quantitative data and contemporary comment.

Of over five hundred known Dock Yard criminals, ages are available for only one hundred and sixty three Yard workers. This information, drawn from the Yard dismissal books for 1793 to 1810, is summarized in Table 4.3.² Once more the dominance of the riggers is clear and as far as the distribution of ages is concerned, *they range from seventeen years to sixty two*, with a heavy concentration between twenty years and thirty nine years. 39% of the cases fall in the twenty to thirty nine age group, and 35.5% between thirty and thirty nine years. Nearly all the other 25% fall in the group thirty to fifty years with two modal ages, thirty and twenty three.³ If these figures are based on a fair sample then it is likely that the ages of thieves reflect the age structure of the Yard workforce in general and that age was not an important factor in determining criminal activity. The distribution of ages is somewhat biased because the age of apprentices or boys is rarely given.

¹ P. Colquhoun. A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis op.cit. p.81.

² P.R.O. ADM/106/3006 3007 Dismissal Books of Artificers.

³ Modal ages, i.e. the age recurring most often in a frequency distribution of the ages of Yard thieves.

Table 4.3 A Summary of the Data from Dock Yard Dismissal Books
for 1793 to 1810.

Riggers	49	Bricklayers	3
Labourers	36	House carpenters	2
Scavermen	33	Sailmakers	2
Riggers Labourers	10	Sailmakers apprentices	1
Shipwrights	9	Sawyers	2
Shipwrights apprentices	3	Oarmaker	1
Bricklayers labourers	7	Caulkers apprentices	1
Joiners	3		
		Total	162

<u>Age in years</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
17	1	42	2
18	0	43	3
19	3	44	2
20	4	45	1
21	3	46	2
22	4	47	2
23	8	48	3
24	12	49	0
25	8	50	4
26	8	51	3
27	7	52	1
28	4	53	0
29	6	54	0
30	9	55	0
31	12	56	0
32	3	57	0
33	7	58	0
34	5	59	0
35	5	60	0
36	5	61	0
37	6	62	1
38	8	63	
39	2	64	
40	7	65	
41	2		

A number of instances involving riggers and ropemakers suggesting that Dock Yard crime rested on a certain degree of group support have already been cited.¹ These were not the only examples of mass action in support of thieves.

In 1808 Commissioner Grey complained that,

"... a most disgraceful assemblage of Persons took place Yesterday Evening outside the Dock Yard Gates and numbers of the different Departments of the Dock Yard apparently intending to illtreat a Man who had been called upon by the Magistrates to identify a chest belonging to a sawyer, with whom he worked - and who had been taken up for Embezzling King's Stores ..."²

This had followed a demonstration around a sawpit where "... improper Expressions against the Officers of the Dock Yard" had been uttered. These incidents are interesting because they also involved a group of apprentices who had been found hiding in the Yard after work so as to ambush and maltreat the sawyer.³ The norms which appear to have upheld crime in the Dock Yard were supported with occasional violence by skilled as well as unskilled men. When an officer was appointed to check the abuses that had grown up around chips it was claimed that it was necessary to give him an escort to and from the Yard.⁴ The best example of the strength of feeling that could be aroused against those who broke the rules, comes from an earlier date. In 1780 a Portsmouth dealer in stolen copper was brought to trial on the evidence of one of his employees. It was estimated that he had sold to London stolen copper to the value of £1,400. At the Assize he was in fact found not guilty and he brought a civil action against the informer. This man was forced to pawn his clothes and complained that,

¹ See pp 428, 433

² N.M.M. POR/C/26 16.4.1808

³ Ibid.

⁴ M.S. Bentham The Life of Brigadier General Sir Samuel Bentham (1862) p.143.

"... in consequence of my exposing my late master ... the trades people and merchants of this and adjacent places treat me with a great deal of coolness and indifference I may with propriety term it contempt."¹

Fear of being thought an informer led one prosecution witness to perjure himself by denying that he had sent for Mr. Mottley when a Yard apprentice left some stolen iron bolts with him.² It would thus seem clear that Dock Yard crime was part of a much wider social system held together by obligations, common interest ~~shared~~, and values, with some degree of intimidation, which extended to the local community. The first step in providing further support for this contention is to establish that a market for stolen goods existed.

While some of the items taken from the Yard might have been of use to the workers, many, such as copper, iron and hemp, were clearly desired for their cash value; this obviously presumes the existence of a market for such goods.

"Great inconveniences, loss to the service and injury to individuals accrue from the petty dealers in old naval stores contiguous to the Dockyards who too frequently are the promoters of embezzlement and the ruin of poor people and their families",

wrote the Commissioners on Fees and perquisites in their sixth report.³

Colquhoun expanded on this:

"Many vessels of the coasting trade and even ships of foreign nations, it is said, touch at Portsmouth and Plymouth merely for the purpose of purchasing cheap stores - and it is well known that many dealers in naval stores in the neighbourhood of the Dockyards are chiefly supplied in this way."⁴

In another context, Colquhoun listed the receivers as those who dealt in:

"... old Metal, Rags and Handstuffs, Secondhand naval stores, secondhand wearing Apparel, itinerant Dealers in wearing apparel

¹ R. Knight op.cit. p.188

² P.R.O. ADM 106 1.5.1802

³ P.P. 1806 (306) Vol p.31 6th Report Commission on Fees and Perquisites.

and Metals, Persons keeping Crucibles and melting pots, Persons keeping Draught or Truck carts to remove metals or stores."¹

Their merchandise was listed as:

"... new and old cordage, bolts of canvas, sails, Bunting, twine of all sorts, Fearnalight, and kersey, Leather and Hides, old and new copper, locks, Hinges, Bolts, copper bolts and nails in immense quantities, Bayiron, old iron, lead and solder, shipsplank, Oars, Timber of small sizes, Blocks, Quarterstuff, Candles, Tallow, oil, Paint, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, Varnish, Rosin, Beer, Rum, Oil, Vinegar, Butter, Cheese, Beef, Pork, Etc."²

It must be remembered that the Dock Yard was not the only Government institution in or near Portsmouth. There were also the victualling establishments, barracks and the Ordnance depot. Colquhoun estimated that from Portsmouth alone one million pounds a year were lost from the Government during the war. The figure was half a million during peace including frauds and embezzlement by contractors, Dock Yard clerks and naval personnel.³ Though Colquhoun had a predilection for precise, if spurious, quantification and his estimates need to be treated with care, this figure was widely accepted at the time and much of what he says in other respects is born out by other evidence.⁴

Of the sixty-two known civilians involved in Dock Yard thefts, the occupation of fifteen has not been discovered. Three were riggers employed by a contractor to the Navy, twelve were seamen and waterman, including several ship's masters, three were ropedealers and six were dealers in naval stores. There were also one carter and a higgler, the rest were local tradesmen. The dominance of tradesmen and maritime workers is clear. There were other strong connections between the town's tradespeople and the Dock Yard employees, that might have had a bearing on

¹ Ibid p.187

² ditto p.79

³ ditto p.75

⁴ Naval Chronicle 6 (1801) p.24
Brenton op.cit. p.159

thefts from the Yard. Until 1805 the Yard People had to rely on shopkeepers and dealers for credit because they were paid in arrears.¹

Tradesmen also provided bonds for the storehouse labourers and may also have stood security for those thieves who were caught. Further it is possible that the tradesmen were also the area's landlords.²

On the evidence so far considered, it is plausible to base a model of a market system dealing in stolen Government stores. For petty pilfering from the Yard could not have supplied commodities at the rate or in the quantity demanded. The middlemen, receivers and retailers of stolen goods must have played the critical part attributed to them by Colquhoun and the Commissioners on Fees and Perquisites. The model consists of three major elements, which in turn can be divided. First, there is the primary stage of the supply by theft of the stores. Part of this, petty pilfering and systematic thefts by Yard workers, has already been considered, but there were also large organised gangs which operated from both within the Yard and from without. Secondly, there is the purchase and resale of stolen stores transactions which may be broadly divided into three forms of activity. Most simply there were local dealers who purchased purloined materials for their own use or resale. The two other types of receiver

¹ See p.

² See p.

N.M.M. POR/C/23 18.5.1795

The following are listed as providing securities for six labourers entered to do temporary duty.

Thos. Tout	Portsea Shoemaker
John Furnell	" "
William Commings	" "
Thomas Batchelor	Carter
Thomas Mathew	"
John Keats	Plasterer
Missing	Brazier of Portsea
Soaper	Gentleman of Kingston
Fowles	Portsea laker, mentioned twice
Henry Weetford	Victualler of Portsea
Honeyman	" " "

are identified by Colquhoun as "Retail Dealers" and "Wholesale Dealers".¹ The former were the local agents of the latter who, operating from London, drew on all the Dock Yard towns, a feature that indicates the third element in the model, transportation. The best support for these generalisations is an examination of some individual cases.

The Darby family provided an excellent example of local tradesmen dealing in stolen stores. In 1810 John Darby, John Darby junior, George Darby and Thomas Darby, a father and three sons who had a metal dealer's and brazier's business in Gosport, were indicted for possessing iron and copper with the King's mark on it. They were cleared of the charge on the evidence of one of the sons that the iron had been purchased by his uncle who had once occupied the shop and who produced a receipt as proof. No excuse was offered for the copper.² Five years later John Darby senior was indicted again for possessing stolen copper. His three apprentices claimed that a trade in stolen metal had been carried on since the last trial. They also said that his son, George, was a partner in the business and the owner of a shop in Southampton, but the father stated that his son was only a journeyman.³ Another Darby, Richard, was tried in 1824 for possessing King's copper and had apparently at least one previous conviction.⁴ In 1828 there were more complaints about the Darbys and their relations resident in Gosport, Portsea, and Fareham.⁴ This family's activities were obviously large scale and continuous, but they were by no means unique. For instance, in 1812 a master blacksmith and wheelwright, with workshops in Portsea and Portsmouth, was said to have employed two men for the past

¹ P. Colquhoun Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis op.cit. p.46
² N.M.M. POR/D/29 7.9.1810
 N.M.M. POR/D/29 10.10.1810
³ N.M.M. POR/D/31 20.12.1815
⁴ P.C.R.O. P/L/15.

two years to beat out the King's mark on stolen copper and to work it up.¹

The dealers in stolen stores were probably behind the gangs that raided the Yard. It is difficult to believe that the riggers who stole two or three hundredweight of rope, or the gang that stole a boat load of stores, or those men that removed a half hundredweight anchor stock, did so on the mere chance of finding a buyer. In 1797 Mr. Mottley reported a case where a Boatswain had taken junk, that is old rope, out of the Yard under cover of the name of ships stores, then, deliberately absenting himself, he allowed the junk to be landed and sold at a house on Portsmouth Point.² The houses on the Point had direct access to the sea. Another gang, one night during 1796, removed ten to twelve tons of stores from a lighter moored in the harbour. A flotilla of small boats must have been necessary to do this and in fact *a number of boats were taken* by the security. The name of Mr. Goldsmith was painted on two of the craft. Goldsmith was referred to by the Resident Commissioner as "a notorious offender". As a result of this operation against thieves the Dock Yard saw a separate incident in which the watch caught another boat unloading stolen stores.³

In 1809 it was proposed to register all small craft and to number them, in order to curb the illegal activities of watermen and boat owning locals. In one case, wherry-men were partners in crime with some artificers, fitting out a naval vessel in the harbour, and a Gosport victualler. The latter was building tenements using wood thrown overboard by the workmen and

1 N.M.M. POR/D/29 28.6.1812
 2 N.M.M. POR/F/22 16.1.1797
 3 N.M.M. POR/F/22 20.7.1796

collected by their accomplices in small boats. Another receiver had a vessel in the harbour on which he hid embezzled stores. Even more striking as an entrepreneur of crime, was one Mr. Walker; the "celebrated Mr. Walker" or the "incorrigible Mr. Walker" as the Resident Commissioner put it. Despite having been convicted several times for possessing King's stores Walker tried to deal in a legitimate capacity with the Yard. The authorities were never sure where to find him because he had two or three houses in the town. When Walker was finally committed to the Assize, on a charge of possessing stolen stores, he produced an affidavit, the contents of which, for reasons unexplained, "staggered" Saxton and Greetam.¹ Another well-known receiver was Mr. Missing, "a noted stolen copper merchant", listed in a trade directory as a coppersmith, brazier and tinman of Portsea. A Mr. Missing, "brazier of Portsea", was one of the securities paying half the bond for a temporary storehouse labourer in 1795.² In connection with a subsequent case it was said that he had "fled from the Country for fear of punishment".³ Some years later, another dealer was operating a daily collection of stolen copper, which was sent to a foundry outside the town.⁴

The relative immunity which the receivers seem to have enjoyed, arose because they were able to cover their dishonest activities with the pretence of legitimate trade. There is some suspicion that even naval contractors sometimes dealt in illegally obtained stores; for in the Act

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/21 4.5.1798 ; N.M.M. POR/F/23 4.5.1798 ; 10.7.1798
A Mr. Walker is listed in the 1798 trade directory as a broker and another reference of that year says that he had engaged in partnership with a Mr. Russel, a carrier between Portsmouth and London, since when copper had been found in their waggons.

² N.M.M. POR/C/23 18.5.1795

³ Naval Chronicle op.cit.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/D/31 4.5.1811

of 1801 they were explicitly said not to be exempt from its provisions.

In 1806, the Admiralty's solicitor was consulted about prosecuting contractors who sold to private buyers stores with King's mark on them.¹

Ex-naval stores sold legitimately were usually accompanied by a certificate from the Navy Board. This practice was given the force of law by the 1801 Act and the falsification of such certificates was made corporally punishable and subject to a fine of £200, the fine indicating the "white collar" nature of this offence. Despite this, the use of forged certificates was one of the most common means of providing a cover for stolen goods because the description of items sold does seem to have been very exact. A certificate of a sale several years old was sometimes produced as proof of innocence against charges of receiving stolen stores. In 1797 it was complained that,

"... on any information being made where stores have been carried, the officers come to search, it may so happen that the man whose stores they are about to examine may produce a certificate and it would be impossible to swear to a piece of rope unless it be new."²

The sales themselves offered an opportunity for theft.

"I feel much concerned at the prospect of the Evil likely to occur by the disposal of the various articles by frequent public sales And the unavoidable indiscriminate admission of all classes of People into the yard, the principal business of many of whom would be to embezzle whatever they could possibly carry away and the subterfuge it would afford for having pieces of old iron and nails in their possession."³

wrote Commissioner Grey in reply to a proposal to sell waste wood by auction.

To overcome these difficulties, the government adopted a number of expedients. Known offenders were sometimes banned from sales and all stores

¹ P.R.O. ADM 106 1764 12.4.1806

² N.M.M. POR/A/40 22.3.1797

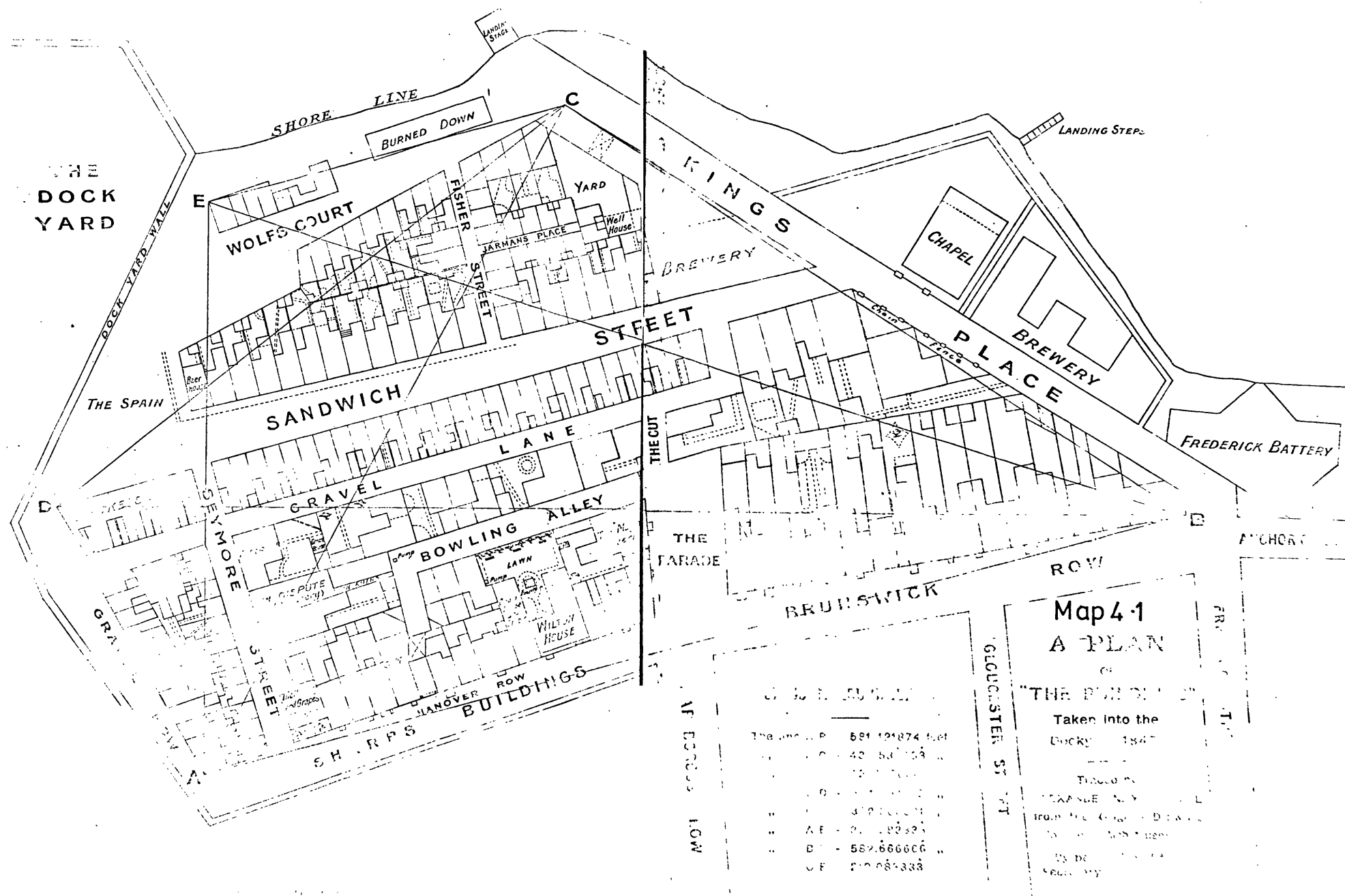
³ N.M.M. POR/F/30 5.4.1810

if possible, were marked: metal and timber with the broad arrow, rope and sails by distinguishing threads. Even so, this only led to another form of illegal employment. A case has already been cited in which a blacksmith had men working for him full time to beat out the King's metal and Colquhoun claimed that some rope dealers employed men just to untwist rope and remove the coloured threads. Even the use of marks on stores created legal difficulties and hindered the successful prosecution of thieves, because the markings sometimes differed from those laid down in the various Acts on the subject.¹

If a dealer purchased an old vessel for the purpose of breaking it up, he was obliged to return all copper and mixed metal articles that came from it to the Dock Yard, though apparently iron was exempt from this rule. The purchasers of off-cuts and chips were similarly required to return all the metal they found in it within thirty days and to present an affidavit saying that they had done so. Judging from regular payments to one contractor, who for some years removed waste wood from the Yard, it would seem that some compensation was made for the metal that was returned. From 1802, all rope sold by the Dock Yards was supposed to be cut into sixfoot lengths; but this rule was not rigorously enforced, leading to the suggestion that return clauses, similar to those concerning metal, should be put into the conditions of sale. The Navy Board, however, turned the idea down.

The real problem was that naval stores of all forms were so common along the south coast that it was difficult to tell what had been come by legitimately and what had not. One man was able to prove that he had obtained some marked nails by breaking up an old boat. Even new boats

¹ P.R.O. ADM 106 1764 25.3.1805



delivered from a merchant builder to the Yard were found to be built with the King's nails; no prosecution was made because it was said to be the practice of all merchant boatbuilders and that it was possible that the nails had become mixed with ordinary nails at the mill from where, it was claimed, they had been purchased. Saxton commented: "I fear that there is some nefarious practice carried on this way by the Great Contractor or some of his private agents"; but no proof of this was offered.¹

The market for stolen naval stores was so widespread that innocent parties were easily involved. Some tradesmen claimed to instruct their employees not to purchase any doubtful items; but many more appear to have been willing to be occasional customers and it seems that small quantities of stolen stores were hawked around various shops in the locality.

One of the most striking features of thefts from the Dock Yard, when viewed in a local context, is the frequency with which the New Buildings are mentioned (see Map 4.1). This was an area contiguous to the Yard, forming a salient into it. The locality enjoyed a wide frontage on to the harbour and a hard which was the main access to the ships laid up in the creeks. On a plan drawn by the Master Shipwright to show proposed security arrangements, the area of the New Buildings was marked: "This part inhabited by all the Thieves of the place".² It was from here that Mr. Goldsmith had operated and where the other boat captured that night had been taken unloading its booty. A gang of riggers also sent a boat load of stores to the same place. Saxton called it, "... the exceeding bad neighbourhood (equal to any about Portsmouth)"³, and on another occasion,

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/24 9.12.1800
² P.R.O. ADM 106 24.10.1807
³ N.M.M. POR/F/22 9.2.1797

"... the very worst part of our neighbourhood". He was even worried that guards posted outside the wall anywhere near the New Buildings would be corrupted. Grey confirmed these assessments when he wrote of "... the whole of the outside of the Yard North of the Guard House at Bonfire Corner being inhabited by the most Disorderly People in the whole place."¹ Moreover, the 'infamous' Mr. Walker was spoken of as being of the New Buildings and a lawyer is disparagingly referred to by Commissioner Saxton as "... our celebrated solicitor of the New Buildings". This particular comment was not in connection with a criminal matter, but in its context it is clear that Saxton had had previous uncomfortable dealings with Mr. Godden, the attorney in question.² One can only wonder what his relations were with his criminal neighbours.

One of the activities of the inhabitants of this locality would appear to have been salvaging. The Navy paid a reward equal to the value of any stores found in the sea and on the beach and returned to the Dock Yard. Such payments were frequent; but in one case the Resident Commissioner refused to pay the reward. He justified his action to the Navy Board by saying the man concerned was a "well informed hand" of the New Buildings who was constantly sailing his boat around. The man claimed to have found a small craft as he was returning home at four o'clock in the morning but brought no witnesses to prove it. Saxton said that the rope securing the boat had been cut. He also thought that such deceptions were not uncommon.³

The impression of the area that one is given is that it was inhabited by a close community which formed a small rookery with a set of social values of its own. The suggestion that there existed in the New Buildings

¹ N.M.M. POR/F/24 24.10.1807
² N.M.M. POR/F/22 19.2.1797
³ N.M.M. POR/F/24 3.11.1801

a self-aware social subsystem, is supported by several facts. Reference has already been made to the area's location which tended to make it somewhat isolated. Further, its waterfront meant that communications did not have to be orientated towards the town. A large scale map of the locality shows that it had enough public houses to provide a social life of its own.¹ The contention that the inhabitants thought of themselves as members of a group distinguishable from the citizens of the town at large is backed up by the account of a local historian writing after the area had been demolished,

"... this is a small suburb or town in miniature .. a burlesque ceremony of electing a Mayor and Corporation for the New Buildings formerly took place here annually with much buffonery and licentiousness."²

However self contained, the New Buildings were but part of a much wider social system, a system centred on London and reaching to several other towns. As the local thieves and dealers have been dealt with, the parts of the system that extended over a wider area will now be considered.

Several cases provide information about the country-wide and even international trade in stolen stores. The Portsmouth merchant, Walker, had links with London that have already been noted. In 1808 the magistrates of London and Portsmouth cooperated when stores from the recently seized Danish fleet, laid up at Portsmouth, were found in London, and a Gosport rope dealer was named as selling them. The most striking example of the trade in stolen naval stores arose in 1801, when Mottley seized, from a carrier's officer in Portsea, two casks of copper addressed

¹ See map 4.1

² H. Slight Chronicles of Portsmouth (3rd Edn.1828).

to Owen and Company of London. The copper bore the mark of the King's arrow.¹ On proceeding to Town, Mottley obtained a warrant from the city's Lord Mayor, though presumably he could also have applied to the Commissioners of the Navy, to search the warehouse of Owen and his partner Mardle in Houndsditch. The partners were considered to be "two of the most considerable copper merchants in London". Accompanied by the City Marshal Mottley went to the warehouse and found an immense amount of copper marked with the broad arrow. Neither of the accused would admit anything and tried to prove their good character by bringing a witness to testify that the mark stamped on Government copper could be easily overlooked. However, the prosecution forced the witness to confess that he had handled stolen copper from Missing of Portsmouth, who had found it expedient to leave the country. These revelations were halted by the Judge intervening on behalf of the witness, who was being forced to incriminate himself. Other evidence included a letter found on one of the accused men from a man awaiting trial in Chatham for stealing King's stores, requesting that money be sent to him.² Owen and Mardle were convicted and tried on a further charge; but they had fled. Their sureties lost a thousand pounds and the goods of the two merchants were escheated.³ The Owen and Mardle case was not an isolated incident.

Another trial before King's Bench in 1804 was said to have exposed "a most enormous system of fraud".⁴ Other merchants had connections with smaller and nearer towns than London, such as Chichester and Arundel.

¹ Hampshire Telegraph 6.4.1801

² Naval Chronicle op.cit.

³ P.R.O. ADM 1 22.12.1801

Hants. Tel. 28.12.1801

ibid 15.3.1802

⁴ Naval Chronicle Vol.11 1804

Others traded even further afield than the Capital.¹ In 1802 the Treasury sent the Admiralty a report that at Aberdeen there was "... an extensive Trade said to be carried by the fraudulent purchase of stores belonging to his Majesty at Chatham."² There is reason to suppose that Portsmouth's receivers were any less enterprising than those in Chatham for, in 1816 there were two cases involving the export of stolen goods to France.³

In the light of what has been said, it seems clear that the transportation of stolen goods must have been on a large scale forming a major part of the criminal scheme of things. Colquhoun said that stolen goods,

".. are conveyed to town by means of single horse carts, kept by Itinerant Jews and other doubtful characters, who travel to Portsmouth, Chatham, Woolwich and places in the vicinity of London, for the purpose of purchasing metals from the persons who are in the habit of embezzling the King's stores, or the dealers on the spot .. These single horse carts have increased greatly of late years and have become very profitable."⁴

Though no support can be found for Colquhoun's description it seems safe to accept it as sensible because his other evidence has been found reliable. However, something can be said of another method used to move illicit goods. It would seem that criminals involved with the Dock Yard used legal means of transport. Walker, the notorious receiver, went into partnership with a legitimate carrier, and the Owen and Mardle case began in a carrier's office. Another theft was uncovered when a package was delivered to the wrong person in Chichester from the Portsmouth Coach.⁵

While in these instances, the carriers were apparently innocent of any criminal intention, there were cases where they were involved in the

1 P.R.O. ADM 106 1765 1.7.1808
 2 P.R.O. ADM 2 631. 1.8.1802
 3 N.M.M. POR/D/31 3.11.1816
 4 P. Colquhoun Treatise on Police op.cit. p.187
 5 P.R.O. ADM 106 1765 1.7.1808

offence. In 1812 a London-bound cart belonging to a large and reputable coaching firm was stopped several miles outside of Portsmouth and several large heavy baskets were seen to be loaded on to it. A search revealed that these containers held over four hundredweight of Naval copper. The carter denied that his employers knew anything of the transaction or that he knew what the packages contained. However, he admitted that he had taken a similar load to London three weeks earlier. The items had been off-loaded, one by John Kent at Wandsworth Common, who had also paid him. The second load had also been given to the carter by Kent, a higgler and former Yard employee, previously charged with felony, who was known as a suspicious character.¹ In a further case, the driver of the Gosport waggon acted as agent for Richard Andrews, a dealer in rope and rags of the New Buildings. The waggoner tried to sell a sample of copper to a Staines merchant who reported the incident to the Navy Board. The Bow Street magistrate refused to issue a warrant to search the waggon but despatched an officer to Staines. There he arrested the waggoner when he returned with forty pounds of copper. As the copper was cut very small and much battered, no mark could be discerned; nor did a search of Andrews's premises in Portsmouth reveal enough evidence to support a charge.²

Coastal vessels would have provided yet another means of transporting stolen goods and there were several instances of ships being found with large quantities of stores on board.

In reviewing the membership and activities of the deviant groups and the processes associated with thefts from the Dock Yard, we have

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/29 2.12.1812

² P.R.O. ADM 106 1765 13.2.1805

contended that their operation was sufficiently continuous and coherent to be regarded as a social system. We must now examine the relationship between this system and the machinery of law and justice.

One historian of criminal law has written:

"In each development of the law the particular step taken was a resultant of forces determined largely by social and economic conditions, the existing legal sanction, the whole body of precedent, and the established judicial techniques. The interplay of law, case, and conditions can only be understood when the meaning of each factor is known."¹

In this study it is not intended to consider the way in which the criminal law changes in its social context but to examine the way in which a small part of it was administered in a specific social situation. The main features of the law on the subject of the embezzlement of government stores have already been outlined; but the legal processes have yet to be considered.

By its charter, Portsmouth's magistrates were; the Mayor, the previous Mayor, the Recorder, who was a barrister, and three Aldermen. The magistrates' jurisdiction was limited to non-capital offences. Besides the four Quarter Sessions, twice weekly Petty Sessions were held, at which suspects were examined by the magistrates so that they could decide whether to free them, try them summarily or to commit them for trial either at their own Sessions or at the Assizes. In the case of petty larceny, the magistrates could grant bail, otherwise the accused was held in jail locally or in Winchester. Witnesses were also bound by recognizances to appear at the trial.²

In Portsmouth the Grand Jury, which considered indictments at the Quarter Sessions, was drawn from two permanent lists of twenty three names

¹ J. Hall Theft, Law and Society op.cit. p.79

² N.M.M. POR/D/31 969 1815.
P.C.R.O. S/G/2 - 11.

each, which included the most substantial inhabitants of the Borough's two parishes who were not Aldermen. To be put upon the list was considered an honour.¹ The Petty Jury, before which the trial took place if a true bill of indictment was returned by the Grand Jury, was also drawn from two lists, in this case of all the Borough's male rate-payers except those in government service. In fact, the duty of service fell upon tradesmen and shopkeepers who served about once every three years.² Many of these arrangements appear to have had little legal basis and were mainly a matter of administrative convenience. There was great confusion over the law about jury service and the composition of juries varied widely from place to place. The direction of the Jury, the determination of the sentence and the provision of legal advice appear to have been the responsibility of the Recorder. Sentences imposed by the Portsmouth court varied from fines to transportation, with imprisonment and corporal punishment as intermediate penalties.

As has been previously noted, the civil magistrates in Portsmouth were supplemented by the Resident Commissioner of the Dock Yard whose powers can now be considered further.

Throughout this period the Navy adopted a general policy of prosecuting thieves and receivers of stolen naval stores; this had not always been so. In 1773 the Navy Board had said that the dismissal of workmen who stole was not a great enough deterrent and that in future they were to be prosecuted.³ Ten years later this order was reversed on the grounds that it was proving too expensive and that the prosecutions were not

1 P.P. 1835 (116) xxix op cit

2 Ibid

3 N.M.M. POR/G/ 15.10.1773

always successful. In future petty thieves were to be fined the value of the goods stolen.¹ By the seventeen-nineties the fines had risen to three times the value of the goods stolen, and the culprit was also dismissed. Those merely suspected, or those against whom there was not enough evidence to secure a conviction, were also dismissed. Occasionally, when there were so many cases outstanding as to create a delay, other culprits also escaped with dismissal. However, there was always the threat of impressment for any unprotected man in Portsmouth. Radzinowicz has noted how impressment was used in the eighteenth century to remove undesirable elements from society.²

It is difficult to say to what degree the Resident Commissioner used his powers, under the Act of 1800, to try cases himself. The Gentlemen's Magazine noted, in 1801, the conviction of two men for theft by Commissioner Saxton under a "recent Act"; yet two years later the Navy Board had to remind Saxton of his "full and ample" powers as a magistrate. His successor, Grey, may have been more energetic in this respect, for there are occasional references to sums of money being paid to the Treasury Clerk, "in account of Penalties and convictions for thefts under twenty shillings". Saxton's reluctance to use the Act may have arisen from some initial legal confusion. Soon after the Act was passed, Mr. Greetham, the Admiralty Solicitor's Agent, advised the Commissioner not to try for a summary prosecution, as the local magistrates had reservations about part of the Act.³ Whether Saxton intended to prosecute himself or to have the justices do so, is not clear. A few months later the Navy Board were seeking legal advice as to when a Resident Commissioner

¹ N.M.M. POR/G/ 24.10.1783

² L. Radzinowicz A History of English Criminal Law IV (1968) p.87

³ N.M.M. POR/F/24 29.10.1801

could try a case summarily. The reply must have considerably restricted the usefulness of the Act; it was said that summary jurisdiction only applied to cases where there was no evidence of felony and that if someone was caught trying to take stores out of the Yard they clearly had a felonious intention.¹

If the Resident Commissioner did not see fit to deal with a case himself he could commit the suspect to jail and to the normal procedure of trial, which, though described earlier, can now be considered in detail by means of a number of examples. It will be shown that the Yard authorities felt that there were many obstacles in the way of the successful prosecution of a Dock Yard thief, therefore some attempt must be made to assess how justified this opinion was.

The preliminary examination by the magistrates was very important, because it was here that the nature of the indictment, the venue of the trial and the availability of bail were decided, though under the Act of 1801 the Resident Commissioner could prevent the justices trying the case summarily. As far as the prosecution were concerned, the importance of this stage of the proceedings was that it would determine whether the case was tried by a Portsmouth jury and the length of time the accused would have to spend in jail before his trial. For the town's magistrates it was a matter of their status and local authority; an example of 1803 throws some interesting light on this aspect.

The Yard authorities wanted to make a particular example of three ropemakers who had been helped in a daring theft by a large number of fellow workmen. Mr. Greetham asked the magistrates to commit the men to

¹ P.R.O. ADM 1763 14.8.1801

Assizes on a charge of Grand Larceny. The magistrates delayed a fortnight in coming to a decision and even then, when Greetham had convinced the Mayor to send the men to Winchester, another magistrate arrived, saying that if he were Mayor he would not hesitate to commit the men to the Borough Sessions. To do this the charge had to be reduced to petty larceny which allowed the men to be bailed. One of the accused even had his sureties ready with a bail of £100. The Navy Board was so concerned over this decision that they took legal advice and forbade Mr. Greetham to prosecute for Petty Larceny; while the Resident Commissioner was reminded of his powers as a magistrate.¹ Saxton's comment on the Borough magistrates was, "... their constant struggle to have the management and dealing of all Dockyard culprits is but too well known to the Board for me to add more".² Nor, as the Commissioner had complained, was this the only instance in which the magistrates had ignored the value of the stolen goods when reducing a charge from Grand to Petty Larceny in order to keep the case within their own jurisdiction, which was limited to non-capital offences.

The Navy Board wrote to the Admiralty Solicitor,

"... stating the Board's earnest desire to put a stop to the Borough Justices practice of trying all the felonies at their own Sessions, by Jury of their limited Jurisdiction, where the probability of conviction is trifling and fails of striking example so much to be wished for from a Government Prosecution."

Bicknell, the solicitor, thought that the prosecution for Petty Larceny should be pressed but doubted the right of the magistrates to reduce the charge. He therefore forwarded the Navy Board's letter to the

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/27 15.12.1803

² N.M.M. POR/G/21 17.12 1803

Attorney and Solicitor General. The Governments Law Officers were less than sympathetic defending their profession's integrity. They felt that there was no reason to "cast an imputation upon the Borough Magistrates" as no specific misconduct had been cited against them and that the Recorder, a barrister of emminence, would ensure a fair and legal trial and a punishment of no less severity than would have been inflicted at the Assize on a charge of Grand Larceny. "We therefore think that these prosecutions may with great propriety be carried on at the Quarter Sessions for the Borough of Portsmouth".¹ Despite this snub from the Law Officers, the friction between the Dock Yard authorities and magistrates continued.

Generally, the town's magistrates appear to have been sympathetic to appeals for bail, unduly so in the opinion of the Navy. In one incident, Greetham complained that bail had been granted at so short notice as to make it impossible for the Crown to check on the sufficiency of the sureties offered. In another case the Resident Commissioner had been surprised to learn that a man awaiting trial had been released on bail, his two sureties, Yard workmen, clearly being accomplices. Both bailees withdrew their money after the Resident Commissioner had put pressure on them.²

The Navy's attitude to trial at the Assize varied with the circumstances. In all cases it was more expensive than a local trial and there was a greater delay; but in the opinion of the Yard Officers, there was more certainty of conviction, and the likelihood of more severe punishment. Trial at Winchester was seen as a means of making an example and of circumventing difficulties and opposition arising in Portsmouth. The

¹ P.R.O. ADM 106 1763 6.1.1804

² N.M.M. POR/F/24 9.1.1800

decision of the trial's venue, however, lay with the magistrates, though the Navy may have removed one case from the Borough court by means of a writ certiorari. Not that the magistrates were always obstructive.¹ For example, one man was arrested and committed on a charge of Grand Larceny on the same day as the Assize began, as "a speedy example". In another case, where a complication had arisen, the Magistrates held the culprits for further examination, so that Mr. Greetham could seek instructions from the Admiralty. However, the Dock Yard Officers did not believe that they could count on cooperation from the town's magistracy in all circumstances. The obstacles in the way of the successful prosecution of a Dock Yard culprit must now be considered.

It seems unlikely, because of its social composition, that the Grand Jury was corrupt. Nor, apparently, was it politically biased, as the jurymen were selected from all political factions in the town.² The Navy therefore could normally count on having a true bill returned on its indictments; however the Grand Jury sometimes exhibited rather eccentric behaviour.

A major problem was created in 1812 when three men were charged with stealing metal from the Dock Yard.

"... the Indictment contained as usual two Counts, in the first stating the Articles to be the property of the King and the second the property of persons unknown, and altho' a great number of

¹ There are three cases in which writs certiorari were issued: one on behalf of the prosecution removing the case from the Assize, one on behalf of the defence, involving the Darby's again and a case at Winchester. In the writ removing a case from the Quarter Sessions it is not clear who initiated the move. However little advantage would appear in this for the defendants.

² P.P. 1835 (116) xxiv opcit

Indictments have been found by the same Grand Jury on precisely similar evidence, they in these cases ignored the first count and found on the second only".

The difficulty was that the stores were not marked. The Recorder still considered that there was enough proof to support the first charge. This was also the opinion of the Petty Jury at the first man's trial; but the Recorder said that as this charge had not been found the man could not be convicted of it; nor, now, in the light of the Petty Jury's opinion, could he be convicted of possessing the property of persons unknown. The man had therefore to be acquitted. In the face of this the Yard considered sending other cases to the Assize. A year later the Grand Jury was still adopting the same attitude and Greetham wrote: "... I am firmly of the opinion that all felonies under such circumstances ought to be tried at Winchester Assize."

Such rather perverse behaviour on the part of the Grand Jury is probably the result of an independent attitude and a strict interpretation of the letter of the law, rather than evidence of corruption.¹ But the Grand Juries decision gave rise to the fear on the part of the Yard authorities,

"... of an idea having gone abroad that the taking of store out of the Dockyard not marked is not punishable, (which) will be the means of inducing many to commit still greater depredations in the articles of lead and copper."²

In 1814 Greetham reported that;

"... although the Recorder repeatedly stated to them upon proof of the lead being found secreted under the clothes of the offenders on quitting their work in the Dockyard, the onus was put on them to

¹ In another context J.F. Stephen has noted that legal definitions of crime can be met only by strictness and technicalities in indictments" J.F. Stephen A History of the criminal law of England II (1883) p.293.

² N.M.M. POR/F/31 14.7.1812

Account satisfactorily how they came by the property. I feel considerable difficulty in risking the fate of the Indictment to the determination of such a Grand Jury..."¹

The Dock Yard authorities finally won the argument when the case, to which Greethem was referring, was tried at the Assize:

"... the Judge said it was not necessary that the mark of the Broad Arrow should appear on the lead as a proof of the King's property where the stores were found concealed on the person quitting the Dock Yard because it was to be presumed that every Article of Naval Stores stolen from the Dock Yard was His Majesty's property without proving an actual loss which is seldom possible."²

The prosecution's real problems started with the trial before the Petty Jury. In 1801 Saxton wrote despairingly to the Navy Board, "... the Board are respectfully acquainted with the difficulty of getting a proper Jury - from the circumstance of several of them having themselves been committed for similar offences ...".³ Six years later Greethem reported: "I was under the necessity of changing four of the petty jury who tried Adams, one of whom was Cotten who, as well as his father having been notorious dealers in embezzled stores and have both been tried."⁴ (SIC) The situation was unchanged in 1821 when the Yard Officers complained:

"From the difficulty we have hitherto fore experienced in getting a proper jury at this place totally unconnected either with the Trade or with the defendants themselves in cases of misdemeanour, we were induced to challenge many of the jury notwithstanding which it was apparent during this very long trial, which took 5 to 6 hours that many of those that remained were inclined to be favourable to them."⁵

Portsmouth juries were not unique in their obstruction of Dock Yard prosecution; a man awaiting trial at Chatham in connection with the theft of naval stores wrote to an accomplice asking for money to hire counsel

1 N.M.M. POR/D/30 24.5.1814
 2 N.M.M. POR/D/30 23.7.1814
 3 N.M.M. POR/F/24 1.11.1801
 4 N.M.M. POR/D/28 13.7.1807
 5 N.M.M. POR/L/5 1824 Trial of Richard Darby.

and saying that he had no worries as he had several friends on the jury.¹ Saxton was convinced that the only way of overcoming the problem of the jury and of intimidating would be offenders was to try them at the Assize, as it was, "... the only thing they dread knowing that they have been ever fearless of being tried at the Quarter Sessions."² Moreover the jury was not the only thing that the Navy had to worry about. It was not unknown for defence witnesses to perjure themselves and Greethem complained that even prosecution witnesses sometimes deliberately varied their evidence so as to discredit themselves. Intimidation also affected witnesses, and sometimes defence counsel was party to threats. When John Darby was accused by his apprentices of dealing in stolen stores, his son and their solicitor were said to be making threats against the boys and that they would not "stick at trifles to secure an acquittal".³ Similarly, when a French merchant seaman was a vital witness in another case, the prosecution wished to have him held in custody. It was feared that if allowed recognizance he would return to France; the accused man's solicitor "Having incautiously said that he would take steps to keep him away".⁴ Where the witnesses had been involved in the crime but had turned King's evidence to save themselves, the prosecution needed corroborative evidence as the court would not accept their unsupported testimony.

As far as can be seen, the courts were generous in allowing the accused to defend themselves. At this time the defendant had no right to counsel, except in challenging the indictment's legal form. Nor could he give sworn evidence on his own behalf or call sworn witnesses; but the

¹ Naval Chronicle 6 (1801) p.242

² N.M.M. POR/F/26 16.12.1803

³ N.M.M. POR/F/26 16.12.1803

⁴ N.M.M. POR/D/31 9.9.1815

courts were usually willing to accept an affidavit and generally accepted witness as to good character, In Portsmouth: "The recorder observed that he had known Persons swear to the good character of a Man, although he had previously been convicted of a similar offence and it therefore did not have much weight with him."¹ Despite this, good references from respectable citizens did often serve to win a mitigation of sentence.²

The importance of the Recorder in determining the nature of the court has already been noted and his intervention in a case could often be crucial.³ As a legal expert the Recorder advised the magistrates and the jury on the legality of the charges or a course of action. Thus, in a case where stolen rope was found on a waterlighter, the Recorder directed that the crewmen accused of possession should be acquitted, as they were not on the vessel when the materials were found; an opinion that surprised Greethem. Similarly, it was the Recorder's intervention that secured the acquittal of a woman who had been taken at the Yard gate with yarn in the basket in which she had carried her husband's dinner. Both had been indicted, but the Grand Jury had found a bill against the wife only, despite the husband's confession that he had directed the wife's action. This, however, was pointed out to the Petty Jury by the Recorder and she was acquitted; "... so that the Grand and Petty Jury were exactly opposite in Opinion and the Defendants both escaped".⁴ The Recorder maintained that the woman had been coerced by her husband. Greethem,

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/28 10.4.1806

² N.M.M. POR/D/29 14.10.1811

A case of 1811 demonstrates this "The Recorder said he had with difficulty acceded to pass a less punishment than Transportation on him, but being recommended by the Bench altho he thought the prisoner had imposed on the Persons who had given him a good character..."

³ The Recorder was James Burrough whose eminence is testified by an entry in the National Dictionary of Biography and in E. Foss The Judges of England (1870). He had a reputation for great legal knowledge, kindness and original court room mannerisms.

⁴ N.M.M. POR/D/28 14.3.1809

however, argued that coercion had been presumed by the Recorder and not proved. He feared that this made prosecution of similar cases impossible. There is other evidence to suggest that the Recorder took cognizance of other considerations than just the law when advising the court. In one case: "The Recorder thought the consequent punishment on conviction too great for the offence under the circumstances of the case and recommended an acquittal which was done".¹ This does not accord with the Law Officers' assessment of the Recorders objectivity, though in general these incidents do not appear to have arisen from any intention to deliberately obstruct Dock Yard prosecutions, but rather, reflect a desire to temper the severity of the law either by careful observance of its letter or a display of mercy. This last consideration leads to an examination of sentences and punishments.

Enough has been said already to indicate that the Quarter Sessions did not operate a consistent sentencing policy. However, two general themes can be identified in the determination of punishment. The first principle was that criminal activity should be checked by deterrents and the second was that the harshness of the law should, at times, be tempered by mercy. Of course neither of these opinions were in any way distinguishable from the general view of the relationship between crime and punishment held in the eighteenth century.²

The most severe punishment the Borough Court could impose was transportation, though a public flogging, another punishment available to the magistrates, cannot be regarded as mild.

¹ N.M.M. POR/D/28 20.6.1809

² C. Reith The Police Idea (1938) p.134
L. Radzinowicz op.cit. I (1948).

In 1811 a man convicted of stealing from the Dock Yard was warned that: "The court in passing sentence pointed out the necessity of preventing these thefts and declared they were determined to prevent it and were inclined to send him for Transportation".¹ However, threats had been made before and the need for uniform severity in dealing with Yard thieves had been pointed out.² Only a year later Greethem complained that certain sentences; "... appear to be very mild indeed when compared to former adjudication for similar offences."³

More frequently imposed than sentences of transportation, were those of imprisonment, corporal punishment and fines. The efficacy of confinement in the local gaol, was open to question. Saxton complained that confinement in the town prison did not inspire "due terror", imprisonment there being an opportunity, "... for the invitation and carousal of visiting friends and consoling relatives."⁴ Even so, the Whitehouse, as the gaol was known, was not very salubrious. When it was inspected by the Grand Jury in 1799 the gaol was found inadequate. In 1867 James Neild more than confirmed the Grand Jury's findings.

"This despicable gaol has but one small court yard, 45 feet by 15, for prisoners of all descriptions: so that, on my visit in 1802 I found the five debtors (four of them women), twenty felons and twelve for misdemeanours, all promiscuously crowded together. The Debtors Ward, or day room opens into the court yard and is 17 feet by 9 feet 6. Above the stairs is a sleeping room for female debtors. The Corporation allow a wooden bedstead, with a straw in sacking bed, and a rug each. In the Keepers house are five rooms with beds for which those who can afford it pay 6d. a night."⁵

In 1805 the Borough obtained an act to raise a rate for the construction of a new gaol which was completed in 1808.⁶ If the rules which were

1 N.M.M. POR/D/28 12.1.1811

2 N.M.M. POR/D/28 17.7.1809

3 N.M.M. POR/D/28 4.4.1810

4 N.M.M. POR/F/25 2.1.1805

5 J. Neild An Account of the Rise Progress and Present State - of the Society for the Discharge and relief of debtors (1808) p.447

6 Gates op.cit.

sent to the Home Office as being in force in 1818 are any guide it would seem that the regime of the new prison was much stricter than the old and conditions cleaner.¹

The prison terms imposed on Yard culprits are mainly for periods of three to twelve months. One reason why the Naval authorities liked to press a serious charge was that it meant that the accused would have to spend some time in prison, perhaps even the country Bridewell, before he took his trial; '... it will appear that such a delay operates as an additional punishment upon the offender'.²

Whipping would appear to have been a severe punishment, if not an effective deterrent. The flogging usually took place in public near the Dock gate often at the tail of a cart over a distance of one hundred yards. In 1793 the Assize Judge reduced a sentence of corporal punishment to a £100 fine when the prisoner's wife claimed that being pregnant and, "... of a delicate constitution the shock of so public a disgrace on her Husband would probably occasion her death."³ The judge warned that in future he would sentence all Dock Yard offenders to be whipped.

The pillory was reintroduced locally in 1802 after being unused for forty years. The experiment lasted about a year and the first man to be "publically exposed" treated the affair with contempt.⁴

The judges at both the Assizes and Portsmouth were willing to mitigate sentences in special circumstances. Appeals for mercy on the grounds of old age, youth, ill health and large families could all win a reduction of sentence. Good character was also an influence, though, as

² P.R.O. ADM 106 1766 16.2.1809

³ N.M.M. POR/D/26 16.7.1793

⁴ Hants. Tel. 9.8.1802

.. 16.8.1802

we have noted, it was not always accepted by the court. The willingness of an offender to inform on accomplices was another means of obtaining mercy and deals between the defendant and prosecution occurred even in the court itself.

So far, in respect of punishments, we have considered what sentences could be imposed at the Quarter Sessions and have suggested the general philosophy that lay behind them. It has been noted that those punishments were sometimes mitigated and that sentencing was by no means uniform. To go further with the analysis it is now necessary to consider the Assizes and to try to trace changes in sentencing over time in a more systematic manner.

The Assizes had the same legal powers as the Quarter Sessions with the very important addition of jurisdiction of capital cases. Table 4.4 summarizes all the sentences known to have been imposed on Dock Yard thieves at Portsmouth Quarter Sessions from 1800 to 1815. Table 4.5 does the same for cases thought very likely to have been dealt with at Portsmouth, while Tables 4.6 and 4.7 cover cases tried at the Assize from 1793 to 1815.

Unfortunately the records for both the Assize or the local courts are incomplete. The Quarter Session Calenders are the poorer records and even where they survive it is not always possible to identify Dock Yard offenders. Therefore, the figures used here have been taken from the local press which is why it has not been possible to estimate what proportion of cases involving naval stores, tried at the Sessions, were found not guilty. Generally the newspapers only reported convictions. Moreover the paucity of the data makes it impossible to compare cases involving Dock Yard stores with cases of embezzlement from civilian employers.

Table 4.4 Sentences imposed at the Quarter Sessions on those indicted on charges relating to Dock Yard stores 1800-1815.

<u>Date</u>	1	2	3
1800			
01			
02	1		
03	1		
04			
05			
06	1	1	
07			
08	1	1	
09	3		
10		1	
11		5	2
12	1	11	
13		1	
14			
15			
Total	8	20	2
Approximate %	24	66	6

Column 1 Transportation
 2 Imprisonment
 3 Corporal punishment

Table 4.5 Sentences thought likely to have been imposed on
Dock Yard Offenders at the Quarter Sessions 1800-1815.

<u>Date</u>	1	2	3	4
1800				
01	3	3	2	
02				
03	1	4	2	
04		2	1	
05		3		
06		3		
07				1
08		4	1	
09		7	2	1
10				
11		1		
12		4		
13				
14				
15	1			
Total	5	31	8	2
Approximate %	11	37	17	4

Column 1 Transportation
 2 Imprisonment
 3 Corporal punishment
 4 Fines

Table 4.6 Sentences at the Assize on Dock Yard Offenders.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Death</u>	<u>Transportation</u>	<u>Prison</u>	<u>Corporal Punish- ment</u>	<u>Fines</u>	
1793					4	
94			1		2	
95		2			2	
96					0	
97	1				2	.
98			1		1	
99	1			1	2	
1800			9			
01		1	6	1		
02		2		1		
03	3	1		4		
04		1				
05		1	2			
06						
07			2			
08						
09		1				
10			2			
11	1					
12	4		1			
13			2			
14	1		1			
15		2	5			
Total	11	11	32	7	11	,

Table 4.7 Sentences imposed at the Winchester Assize on
Dock Yard Offenders 1800-1815.

	No.	1	2
Prison Sentences Only	15	12.0	18.5
Prison and Whipping	7	5.50	9.6
Prison and Pillory	2	1.5	2.5
Prison and Fine	17	13.0	21.0
Whipping	2	1.5	2.0
Fines	13	10.0	16.0
Transported	11	9.0	14.0
Outlawed	2	1.5	2.0
Death mitigated to Transportation	12	9.0	15.0
Pardoned	1	1.0	
Not Guilty	43	39.0	
Not Prosecuted	2	1.5	
	<hr/>		
Total	127		

Column 1 Percentage of all cases tried at the Assize

2 Percentage of all cases tried at the Assize in which
a sentence was imposed.

Table 4.8 Known Incidents of Dock Yard Crime and the sentences of transportation and death.

	<u>Incidents</u>	<u>Transportation</u>	<u>Death</u>
1793	18	-	-
94	22	-	-
95	11	2	-
96	18	-	-
97	27	-	1
98	9	-	-
99	28	-	1
1800	69	-	-
01	17	4	
02	43	3	
03	14	5	3
04	15	1	
05	22	1	
06	22	1	
07	17	-	
08	28	1	
09	24	4	
10	13		
11	25		1
12	39	1	4
13	10		
14	10	2	1
15	9	1	

The first question that can be posed with respect to these figures is whether or not punishments meted out at the Assize were more severe than those handed down at the Sessions. At the outset, it must be noted that a fairly large proportion of those tried at the Assize escaped being punished at all. This must qualify assessment of the Dock Yard Officers' opinion that trial at Winchester was more certain to lead to conviction than a case heard locally. However, the crown court appears to have been marginally more severe with Dock Yard offenders than with crimes against civilian property. Between 1800 and 1815 an average of 30% of those charged with property offences were found not guilty as compared to 40% in Dock Yard cases. The Yard officials may have had some ground for their belief that punishments at the Assizes were deterrent because the court could pass the death sentence. However, most capital sentences, if not all, appear to have been commuted to transportation. In all, a third of offenders found guilty at the Assize were transported, but even at Portsmouth fourteen percent of sentences were transportation.

The most common punishment inflicted at the Quarter Sessions was imprisonment, sometimes made harsher by the addition of corporal punishment. Fines appear to have been of minor importance in either court and the most striking feature of the incidence of fines imposed at the Assizes is that they all fall before 1800; that is prior to the introduction of the Act 39 & 40 Geo.3 c.89. What appears to have happened was that the Act was used to inflict imprisonment or transportation on receivers instead of fines. Other changes in sentencing over time are difficult to detect. It has been noted how complex the influences on sentencing could be. The reputation and local standing of the accused, the number of cases awaiting trial, the need for an occasional example were all factors. If, however,

the figures for known incidents and serious sentences are interpreted fairly liberally, allowing for time lapses between the commission of a crime, the detection of the offender and his trial, there is some correlation (not statistical) between the level of crime and the sentencing of prisoners (see Table 4.8) to a certain extent, sentences of death and transportation coincided with periods in which there was a high number of known offences; one court has been quoted as threatening to impose transportation to counter a rising level of offences. It is possible to suggest that a certain degree of criminal activity was expected and that when this level was exceeded deterrent sentences were imposed. The attempt to reintroduce the pillory was during a period in which a large number of offences were committed. Differences in sentencing do not appear to be related to occupational groupings. Fines were most frequently imposed on dealers and tradesmen but they also suffered imprisonment.

Without knowing what proportion of people tried at the Borough court for Dock Yard offences were discharged not guilty, it is difficult to be conclusive about the justification for the Yard Officers' complaints about the local courts. It seems that the magistrates showed no undue partiality towards Yard thieves and receivers. Relations between the magistracy and the Dock Yard were complex, politics and personalities both playing a part. The Bench changed slightly in composition over the years and, when Grey replaced Saxton as Commissioner in 1806, he appears to have achieved a better understanding with the Corporation. It is also possible that some subtle form of social control operated on the magistrates who had to live in a community, a large part of which had a close interest in any case involving naval stores. Having to deal with juries that were likely to be biased in favour of the accused, the magistrates may have hoped that by adopting a moderate course they would be more likely to secure a true verdict.

The norms and activities which, woven together, formed a social system based on criminal behaviour have been described. By way of conclusion the more general values that supported this system must now be considered.

It is clear that the embezzlement of naval stores was an important aspect of life in Portsmouth but its true significance cannot be determined until some thought is given to the nature of crime as a social institution and to some other forms of criminal activity.

Several modern social historians have seen in crime more than a negative reaction to poverty or the expression of depravity. Writers such as Hobsbawm and Thompson have seen crime as the articulation of a near political challenge to the prevailing social and political order. Indeed Thompson and some others have gone further and see crime as part of the culture of the exploited labouring classes, a culture which distinguishes the poor from the rest of society, rather than just the 'resistance movement' to the laws of the propertied.¹

However, in Portsmouth Dock Yard it is difficult to see crime as either a protest or as the manifestation of a separate culture of the poor. As has been shown the Yard workers had effective means of protest which they were not backward in using. Unlike the rural cottager, dispossessed of common rights, or the alienated industrial labourer, the Yard artisans did not have to express dissatisfactions and relieve frustrations through theft and sabotage. Furthermore, one of the main features of this study has been the demonstration that Dock Yard crime was part of a social system based

¹ E.P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class op.cit. p.66
Distinctions between Socio Political and other forms of crime
op.cit.

on a market economy and involving even large businessmen. In this instance crime can be seen as an economic activity that both entangled the thief in the economy of a wider society and exploited him. This point will be considered further in reference to smuggling.

If stealing from the Yard did not represent a form of social protest or an expression of the labouring poor's culture then it is possible that this was due, at least in part, to the nature of what was being stolen. Naval stores were public property, the property of all and the property of none. Colquhoun wrote,

"... it too often happens that a distinction is made as regards moral rectitude, in the minds of many individuals, between the property of the Nation and private property; while the most scrupulous attention to the rules of honour prevails in the latter case the most relaxed are yielded to in the former."¹

From some of the examples that have been cited it is clear that many Dock Yard offenders were not the villainous dregs of society, but it is virtually impossible to say whether or not they were generally honest in other aspects of their affairs. We can, however, note one point which suggests that Yard thieves did not abandon all the prescriptive codes of society. Very little violence was associated with thefts from the Yard. There are no reports of casualties among either the thieves or the security forces. It seems that the culprit was more likely to attempt to bribe his captors than to attack them. If the people who robbed the Yard did not regard themselves as criminals and, as seems possible, they believed that serious punishment was not likely, they may have regarded violence as illegitimate, illadvised and unnecessary. Once again an examination of smuggling will shed some further light. Therefore we look to an analysis

¹ P. Colquhoun op.cit. Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis p.73

of smuggling for information on several points; the operation of a well organised criminal activity supplying a large market and the values associated with such a system. Moreover, smuggling and the embezzlement of naval stores were both crimes which directly affected the Government and called for an official response in the form of statutes and police arrangements.

Poets, writers and Laissez Faire economists have all contributed to give smuggling a heroic reputation unshared by any other criminal activity. Even Adam Smith was sympathetic towards the smuggler, who

"... though no doubt blamable for violating the laws of his country is frequently incapable of violating those of natural justice, would have been in every respect an excellent citizen had not the laws of his country made that a crime which nature never meant to be so."¹

Classically, the smuggler is seen as a bold fellow, daring elements and authority to run large cargoes of "brandy for the parson and baccy for the clerk"; moving his goods through the nocturnal countryside in large convoys.² However, not all the smuggler's activities conformed to this romantic image and an examination of the customs service's attempt to deal with contraband in the Portsmouth area illustrates this.

The extent of the locality chosen for study has been determined by the state of the records. The letter books for any one port are very extensive and a short study such as this is only feasible when these have been indexed. Fortunately the records for Portsmouth have been so organised. In addition the books for the Isle of Wight have been indexed, so allowing these to be used to obtain additional information and to make a comparison with Portsmouth. A full study of smuggling in this region would probably require an examination of contraband running in Sussex and Southampton.

¹ Adam Smith The Wealth of Nations Book IV (1776) Chapter 4.

² Rudyard Kipling Puck of Pooks Hill (1906) A smugglers song.

For the purpose of Customs administration Portsmouth came under the Headport of Southampton, though it had its own Collector, Controller and Surveyor who were responsible for an area extending to Chichester in the east and Titchfield in the West.¹ It is not intended to detail the function of the Customs service, but a brief outline of the establishment at Portsmouth is useful.

Commissioned Officers in the Customs Service at Portsmouth 1806²

The Collector, Controller and Surveyor

Two Tidesurveyors

One Searcher

Four Landwaiters at Portsmouth

One Coastwaiter at Portsmouth

One Coastwaiter at Gosport

Forty Tidewaiters and Boatmen

Three Riding Officers who also acted as Coastwaiters

Thirteen Coalmeisters at Portsmouth

One coalmeister at Langstone

One Coalmeister at Fareham

Weighporter at Portsmouth

Two Night Watchmen at Portsmouth

A Chief Boatman at Hayling Island

Two Cutters with a Commander, Mate and Crew each

Additional to these men was a boats crew of about six stationed in a watch house on Hayling Island. Extra staff were recruited on a temporary basis as they were needed. A Customs House, a boathouse and a warehouse completed the establishment at Portsmouth.

¹ E. Carson The Customs Records of Portsmouth a draft paper PCRO.1/1115
² Custom 58/47 p.49

The brunt of the effort to prevent the importation of contraband fell upon the Tidesurveyors' men, the Tidewaiters, the Riding Officers under their Supervisor and the cutters. The disproportion between the numbers of Riding Officers and Tidewaiters indicates the nature of the Customs' task in this area. Though Portsmouth ranked as a minor civil port, the demands of the Dock Yard brought many merchantmen and transports to the harbour. It was the duty of the Tidewaiters to board these ships, and all others, in order to prevent their cargoes being illegally landed. This duty kept the Tidesurveyors and their staff fully occupied. At times, on the other hand, the Riding Officers patrolling the coast and interior, appear to have been underemployed.

In areas neighbouring on Portsmouth, such as the Isle of Wight and Sussex, smuggling was a well established and very large scale activity with goods being run from the Channel Islands and the Continent. After the American War large armed vessels escorted convoys of smaller ones landing their cargoes, even in daylight, by gangs of two to three hundred men. However, the outbreak of war in 1793 curtailed the activities of the "Free Traders".¹ The Collector at Cowes reported, two year later, that the reduction of smuggling on the Isle of Wight was the result of the vigilance of the revenue cutters, the legitimate employment of seamen in the Navy and the merchant marine, and the fact that the Island's smugglers were being priced out of the market for spirits.

Traditionally the Wight men drew supplies from the Channel Islands; but now cut off from France and Holland, the Sussex smugglers had cornered the market because they had greater capital.² In fact the Channel Islands

¹ D.A. Foster At War With the Smugglers (1970) pp 191-192
W. Cooper Smuggling in Sussex (1966)

² D.A. Foster op.cit. p.28

were of growing prominence in the contraband trade. In 1794 Portsmouth's Customs Officers were told to keep a careful watch for vessels that might be built for sale in Guernsey as smuggling craft.¹ Portsmouth also had close legitimate trading relations with the Channel Islands. Later the French and Dutch reopened their ports to the smugglers but the close continental blockade established by St. Vincent and Collingwood must have hampered their trade and the Channel Islands continued to grow as a centre of smuggling.

By 1799 the Portsmouth authorities were confident enough about their own area to withdraw the Riding Officer stationed at Stokes Bay, leaving some fourteen miles of coast to the west of the town supervised by only one man.² A decline in contraband was noticed to the east in Hayling Bay, where it was reported "... much smuggling has been formerly carried on".³ This reduction in *smuggling may be attributed to the difficulties* experienced by the Isle of Wight smugglers, who ran their goods to the Hampshire mainland. It may also be explained by the greatly increased number of armed forces in the area, making it just too hot for the Free Traders; especially as Naval Captains were known to be very pleased to welcome any captured smugglers into the Service. On the Isle of Wight, however, the military were as much a liability as an asset. In 1804 twenty privates were flogged for their part in stealing two hundred casks of spirits from the Customs Officers and getting drunk.⁴ Another possibility for explaining the decline of smuggling around Portsmouth is that

¹ Customs 58/188 26.5.1794

² Customs 58/36 p.93

³ Customs 58/37 p.83

⁴ Customs 61/17 25. 11.3.1804

the style of smuggling had changed. Attempts may have been made to get contraband past the Customs by hiding it on merchantmen and other ships instead of running it ashore. War increased the number of vessels calling at Portsmouth; not only men of war and transports came into harbour, but merchant ships delivering contract stores and numerous coastal craft, including colliers, put into the port. Moreover, East and West Indiamen called at Spithead for the purposes of forming convoy, collecting or delivering mails and embarking and disembarking passengers.

Petty smuggling by ships' passengers and the crews of men of war was a constant problem for the Customs, though perhaps not their greatest worry.¹ A thorough search was made of all baggage coming ashore with passengers from East Indiamen. More difficult to control were the runs of small quantities of goods from warships to the Point in Portsmouth, Portsea Common Hard and Southsea Common, often with the connivance of the ship's officers. The constant traffic of small boats from the Dock Yard and the town to the ships at Spithead must also have provided a cover for small scale smuggling. One ship's Captain sent a man with his wherry to the Collector complaining of; "Having been much pestered with Smugglers".² Despite all this sort of activity large scale smuggling would appear to have been excluded from the harbour. In 1806 it was reported that new security arrangements were needed, " .. the mode of smuggling being much changed within this port(that is the whole area covered by the Portsmouth Officers), since the smuggling ports have been so strictly guarded."³

The alteration in the system of smuggling appears to have occurred

¹ Customs 58/66 p.57

² Customs 58/35 p.84

³ Customs 58/48 p.55. A different understanding of this reference is that the "smuggling ports" were the French harbours blockaded by the Royal Navy, but in this case it is not so easy to see why this would alter the method of smuggling so far as landing in England was concerned.

with the Peace of Amiens. In 1801 the Supervisor of Riding Officers, who was resident in Stubbington, wrote of his fears that peace would see the resurgence of illegal landings in Stokes Bay. He suggested that as a large seizure had already been made, a Riding Officer should be stationed with him.¹ The Supervisor had been informed,

"... that since the Peace several Persons of this Neighbourhood are about to repair to the Ports of France evidently to establish a correspondence to run Prohibited Goods from there to this country."²

The other senior Customs Officers felt that closer supervision was also needed in Hayling Bay where smuggling was also likely to increase.³ 1801 also saw the only serious clash between smugglers and Customs men recorded in the locality during our period. Two officers were seriously wounded when they tried to seize a large quantity of goods being run ashore on Southsea Common. A very thorough investigation was made and a reward offered which led to the final apprehension of one of the assailants.⁴

The local officer's advice about Stokes Bay was ignored. As the Supervisor feared, serious smuggling recommenced there and continued after war restarted.⁵ In 1807 the officials in Portsmouth reported to London that the coastline for which they were responsible was open and of easy access to boats from the Isle of Wight or small vessels that could come inshore. The cargoes of these craft were not too large to be manhandled and horses and carts were rarely used. The goods were either hidden or taken in small lots to towns in the area. The Officers suggested that the best way to prevent this traffic would be to station small military

¹ Customs 58/36 p.93

² Customs 58/36 p.97

³ Customs 58/37 p.83

⁴ Customs 58/197 p.53. Ports. Tel. 14.12.1801

⁵ Customs 58/48 p.35.

detachments in watch-houses along the coast from which they could patrol. In any event the Riding Officers were moved back to Stokes Bay.¹ It may be a measure of their success that in 1812 not a single seizure or arrest was made by them.² To suggest that this was the result of either corruption or inefficiency would be unduly cynical; for the records suggest that Portsmouth's Customs staff were, by and large, both honest and conscientious.

After the war, the combination of free access to France, low prices there and the unemployment of many of the "lower classes" and seamen of the Portsmouth area, led to a new wave of liquor smuggling, but this was countered by a high rate of detection and capture.³ Relieved of its war time commitments, the Navy was used against smuggling. The

Monthly Magazine reported:

"Several plans are under consideration with a view to suppress the practice of smuggling. Ten ships of war, of different small classes, are to be actively employed in this service at Portsmouth, whilst the various creeks, lakes, etc. are to be vigilantly watched by ships' boats."

Smuggling on the Isle of Wight seems to have followed a pattern similar to that of Portsmouth. An initial reduction after the outbreak of war, a gradual recovery and a marked increase with the Peace of Amiens which continued until smuggling reached a serious level after about 1805.

In 1804 an Island Customs Official wrote:

"Smuggling in the Isle of Wight is now carried on to a very alarming extent and we have no doubt the Sea Fencible System tends much to promote it - as every smuggler holds a Sea Fencible Certificate and passes to Guernsey and Alderney fearless of the Impress or Revenue Officers."⁴

Most of the contraband was apparently imported to satisfy a growing local market created by an increasing population and the large number of

1 Customs 58/51 p.12 Customs 58/204 17.1.1807
 2 Customs 58/69 p.105
 3 Customs 58/75 p.110
 4 Customs 17.34 11.4.1804

troops quartered on the island. The smugglers used specialised craft to run close in shore. They then sank their cargo in small casks at known spots from whence they could be collected for distribution to customers.

"The lesser proportion is often carried on men's shoulders from the landing spots on the South Part of the Island to the North Part and then put into Boats and conveyed to Stokes Bay, Gosport, Southampton River and the New Forest on the Mainland."¹

It is noteworthy that the Wight Free Traders apparently confined their activity to supplying the Island and Hampshire and that Portsmouth was not an important landing spot. Presumably, the Sussex and Dorset smugglers controlled the market and coastline of their own counties and the risk of detection in Portsmouth was, perhaps, too great to allow any significant running there.

By 1810 the situation had changed for the better and the Isle of Wight Customs men were able to tell London: "We have the satisfaction of reporting our unqualified Belief that Smuggling in this district is completely annihilated."² Perhaps this was a slight exaggeration; for in the years that followed a few references still occur to contraband, but the level of running appears to have been low until the return of peace. In 1814 an Officer reported: "We consider smuggling suppressed on the Isle of Wight. No particular Article can be specified as forming a Contraband Trade on the Coast."³ The end of the war, however, brought foreign smugglers onto the scene once again and English vessels also began to run spirits from Cherbourg, Dieppe and other French ports. Not only did smuggling become more rife; it also appears to have become more violent.

¹ Customs 17.34 p.109 11.12.1804
² Customs 21 p.176-7.
³ Customs 25 p.174 1.6.1814

It is difficult to say on what scale the Free Traders were organised in the areas around Portsmouth or at what level they conducted their activities. The report about contact with France shows that, in peacetime at least, local smugglers had well founded arrangements. Some hint of their inland organisation was given by the Chief Boatman at Hayling Island who, in 1792, was approached by the boatswain of a convict hulk in Langstone harbour. Acting on behalf of a Stanstead innkeeper, the boatswain offered the Boatman a bribe of fifty pounds a year to allow smuggling into the harbour.¹

At least one hardened smuggler lived in the vicinity of Portsmouth, a man called James Sherrif who had been involved in the murder of a Customs Officer in Ireland. He came to the attention of the Portsmouth authorities when he tried to defraud the underwriters by attempting to sink his own vessel. He was also involved in thefts from the Dock Yard.²

The great extent of Isle of Wight smuggling in times of expansion is shown by a report of 1802,

"... we assure your Honours that we have most incontrovertable authority for believing that 4/5th. of the inhabitants of St. Helens, and its opposite shore, Bembridge, exist by Smuggling only, who send to sea 20 Sloop rigged vessels ... purposely to varry on their fraudulent practices and that several of these People have and are now enriching themselves by their clandestine Trade with Guernsey and Jersey."³

Two years later it was said that eighteen vessels were engaged in fulltime smuggling, making one trip a month to the Channel Islands with an average cargo of one hundred and fifty small casks.⁴ In 1807 twenty vessels of fifteen to thirty tons were stated as bringing one hundred four gallon casks on every trip and that they made ten trips a year.

¹ Customs 58/23 p.75

² Customs 58/30 p.17 Customs 58/29 p.114

³ Customs 16 p.104

⁴ Customs 17 p.25

In addition there were some cutters of over one hundred tons which flew Revenue colours as a disguise. In all it was estimated that 80,000 gallons of spirit a year, worth £40,000, was run ashore on the Island.¹ Two points can be noted; first, the size of the trade in just one contraband article; second, smuggling does not appear to have been a very time-consuming occupation. Ten voyages a year left those involved with time either to do other work, possibly further voyages on other smuggling craft, or to consume their ill-gotten gains.

In Portsmouth, from July 1805 to September 1807: £24,342 gallons of spirits, 2406 lbs. of tobacco and £2,336 worth of other goods were seized; but only six prosecutions were made and only two of these were successful. In the next quarter 876½ gallons of spirit and goods to the value of £523 were seized, there were no prosecutions.² To judge from the seizure of spirits Portsmouth was a lot less important in the context of smuggling than the Isle of Wight. In over three years little more than a quarter of the quantity seized on the Isle of Wight in one year was taken by the Portsmouth Officers. However, it is very difficult to gauge the extent of smuggling in this area or the involvement of local inhabitants. For, though seizures reached quite large totals, there are no statistics over a long period and despite a number of arrests, successful prosecutions were rare. It is interesting to note that where passengers disembarking at Portsmouth were concerned the confiscation of the goods appears to have been considered a sufficient punishment. Few prosecutions were pursued to a decision, something which may have been due to the high social status of many of the offenders.³

¹ Customs 19/ p.7 Customs 19/103.

² Customs 58/52 pp 37-40.

³ Customs 58/50 p.12

One important point that must be noted, is how responsive to changing conditions smuggling was. For instance, there was a clear seasonal pattern to smuggling. Winter brought long nights and gales which drove the Revenue cutters into port allowing larger smuggling vessels to operate unimpeded. The summer months, on the other hand, enabled many small boats to put out to sea. In the summer of 1811 the Customs was complaining that many small craft infested the Alderney coast under the pretence of being pilot boats. In fact, they were waiting to take contraband to Dorset.¹ It has also been shown that smuggling responded to altering social and military conditions and the attempts of the Revenue service to check the Free Traders' activities. The rate at which illicit importation took place was also controlled by the economics of supply and demand in the home and foreign market. In 1818 the Isle of Wight Customs men explained an increase in smuggling by referring to the fact that seized spirit was no longer sold locally but sent to London for redistillation. In consequence, "... an unexampled and regular demand for Spirits among Tradesmen, Farmers and others ..." had been created.²

The important point that emerges from this examination is that in local studies of smuggling there must be an awareness that a low level of Free Trading in one area does not necessarily indicate a general reduction in criminal activity, but can mean merely a change in the flow of goods away from one locality to another.

It has been well recognised that smuggling was a criminal activity that rested on a large degree of popular acceptance if not actual support; yet the exact implications of this are not known. It is obvious, from

¹ Customs 22/184 20.9.1811

² Customs 30.219 5.9.1818

what has been said so far, that a large part of the population of the Isle of Wight and around Portsmouth were involved to a certain degree in smuggling. It is also clear that involvement could be at one of a number of levels. Professional fulltime smugglers were probably few and they and their specialised craft were generally known to the Customs. Far more numerous were the inhabitants of coastal areas who turned out in large numbers to help land cargoes. Varying degrees of involvement must have existed for those who hid contraband and aided its transport. John Rule has noted the marginal involvement in smuggling of Cornish miners who provided smugglers with pack animals and places of concealment.¹ The most widespread involvement in smuggling was the purchase of contraband.

Considerable numbers of Isle of Wight people were clearly involved in smuggling at all levels, but it is difficult to make the same judgement about Portsmouth where this form of crime does not appear to have been so important. There is no evidence to suggest that the artificers and labourers of the Dock Yard were closely involved in the illicit importation of merchandise. However their part in stealing Naval stores has been shown and smuggling and Yard thefts may have been linked at the level of receiving and distribution. Searches for contraband frequently revealed purloined Government property. While at Plymouth it was well known that the "Regraters", women living from ten to thirty miles away and bringing cheap foodstuffs to the town, purchased any cheap items from the town's receivers for resale in their own districts. Their purchases included both Naval stores and smuggled goods.² The Yard workers probably provided a large market for low priced spirits and other cheap items, while the fine dress

¹ J. Rule The Labouring Miner in Cornwall (Ph.D. Warwick 1971).
² P.R.O. ADM 106. 1769. 5.1.1816

of Portsmouth's whores may well have owed something to the activities of the Free Traders.

Just as there was a strong feeling against those who informed on Dock Yard thieves, informers against smugglers were also subjected to considerable pressure. At least one man "... experienced the usual Scoff and Enmity from his Townsmen and others generally shown when Smugglers are informed against." Great care was taken to keep an informers' tale confidential.¹ However, these instances relate to the Isle of Wight which also provides more examples of attacks on Revenue men than Portsmouth.

In all it would seem that in the area immediate to Portsmouth *smuggling* was only a minor criminal activity when compared with Dock Yard crime. The theft and disposal of stolen Government stores provided full employment for the local criminal elements. Alternative illegal activity, and the presence of so many military and naval units probably explain *why smuggling* was not as important in Portsmouth as one might expect.

Two forms of criminal activity have so far engaged our attention, smuggling and embezzlement from the Dock Yard. Both of these activities can be regarded as institutionalised crime, that is they were on a large enough scale and persistent enough to generate recognisable and repeated patterns of behaviour. In addition to these striking illegal practices, Portsmouth also experienced less systematic crime and disorder. Now it is proposed to analyse the nature of that deviance, looking for any characteristics that might be unique to the social conditions in Portsmouth and for those features that might be of more general significance.

¹ Customs 16 23/77. 5.3.1812
Customs 16 24 p.131

War, as has been shown, led to Portsmouth experiencing rapid expansion. The effect of this growth on crime could have been two-fold. On the one hand, employment opportunities were increased and for many war was a time of prosperity; therefore there was an affluent society to be both plundered and to purchase stolen goods. On the other hand, there was an influx to the area of soldiers and sailors, and with them, women and children. The penchant of eighteenth century servicemen for crime and disorder is too well known to require further consideration. But as there were few employment opportunities for women in Portsmouth and as many servicemen's families were left to fend for themselves, it might be expected that they were also inclined to criminal behaviour.

Local influences were overlaid by more general economic and social trends. Most important, in this particular context, was the movement of prices. An attempt to assess changing living standards in Portsmouth has been made elsewhere but the years in which conditions became critical can be restated.¹ High price years were: 1795, 1800, 1801, 1809 and 1812. Peace created distress from late 1801 to early 1803 and again after 1814, particularly when demobilisation was completed in 1817. To be brief, there are a number of simple hypotheses to be tested. In order of declining generality they are: First, that there is a correlation between years and periods of economic hardship and high crime levels; second, war led to a serious increase in crime and disorder in Portsmouth; third, one social group, unattached women, can be identified as playing an important role in the deviant activity of the area.

The material for substantiating these suggestions is sadly inadequate. Besides the usual weaknesses of material relating to the history of crime,

¹ See p. 267

which generally relate to their being the records of the repressive authorities, Portsmouth's archives are incomplete and untrustworthy. Information on the number of criminal cases tried can be obtained from four sources. For cases tried at Winchester there are the Assize records. For offences heard before the borough magistrates at the Quarter Sessions there are a certain number of draft and final calendar books, but these do not cover every year. A parliamentary return gives information on the number of males and females committed for examination, summary process and trial at the sessions or at the Assizes on charges of misdemeanour or felony from 1803. In addition, some indication is given of the outcome of the cases. Finally, a manuscript provides another source of data for the years after 1802.¹ The material from these sources has been summarised on graph 4.1. The only conclusion that can be drawn from this exercise is that the material is difficult to use in any meaningful quantitative analysis. Not only do the figures fail to correspond in absolute terms,

P.R.O. Assi.23 8 to 10 Assize Gaol Books 1790-1815
P.C.R.O. Quarter Sessions Calendar Books

S/6/2	Epiphany 1792	to	Easter 1794
S/6/3	Michaelmas 1797	to	Easter 1800
S/6/4	Epiphany 1798	to	Midsummer 1799
S/6/5	Michaelmas 1800	to	Epiphany 1803
S/6/6	Easter 1803	to	Midsummer 1804
S/6/7	Midsummer 1804	to	Epiphany 1805
S/6/8	Epiphany 1809	to	Midsummer 1809
S/6/9	Michaelmas 1809	to	Michaelmas 1810
S/6/10	Easter 1812	to	Easter 1813
S/6/11	Epiphany 1815	to	Easter 1816

P.P. 3rd Report of the Inspectors 1838 XXXI p.223
P.C.R.O. CC 7/51/1.

they also fail to conform to the same pattern of movement, showing a different trend one year with another. Further, there are problems as to the classification of crimes, particularly in the calendar books where offences are described differently at different times but always in a way that gives little indication of the actual nature of the crime.

When Assize cases are considered the correspondence between the figures from the manuscript and official return is fairly close, but both differ markedly from the figures from the Assize records (see Table 4.9 and Graph 4.1). The most striking example of this is the year 1807, when there were no committals recorded from Portsmouth but when seven cases from there were tried at Winchester. Some time could elapse between the committal of an offender and his trial at the Assizes.

In the face of the paucity of the statistical evidence we are thrown upon other sources and the most aggregate of the figures, the total number of committals, available from 1803 (see Graph 4.2). These figures are probably quite a good indicator of criminality in the area because they include cases tried summarily and examinations. These last would include people suspected of a crime even if there was not enough evidence to press the case for trial.

There is little literary material indicating changing crime levels in Portsmouth, only scattered references in newspapers and guide books. The latter make it clear that the area had a reputation for at least disorder

"The idle prejudices to which Sea Ports, and particularly this, are liable; and the unpardonable misrepresentations of the careless and inattentive, of the interested and designing, which have deterred many from visiting it, will easily be removed by personal inspection. Few are those happy situations that are not liable to some inconvenience; few where the contagious influence of Vice is not predominant: that this place is peculiarly exposed to these ills, may

fairly be denied, all scenes of tumultuous revelry being confined to particular districts beyond which they have no effect."¹

Other writers were also at pains to defend their town against what they considered to be unwarranted slurs, but they appear to have been concerned with, drunkenness, prostitution, and similar sources of disorder rather than serious crime.

The highest figure for indictments in the parliamentary return is explained by the note: "Many deserters from the Navy and disorderly women." Even so, one writer thought that native involvement in crime and disorder of all sorts had increased.

"Our brothel-houses are become numerous and our alehouses, and gin, and pawnshops, now almost defy calculation. Lawyers have multiplied upon us exceedingly. Malefactors are more numerous. We have greater need of constables and bumbaliffs. Our country sessions and assizes are chiefly occupied by our suits and litigations, and the misdeeds done amongst us. Our town sessions are intolerably long. Our country gaol has been rebuilt on an enlarged plan, partly, I suppose, on account of our supplies to it; and our borough gaol has for sometime past been voted insufficient to accommodate the number of its tenants; and upon the whole ... I verily believe there is more irreligion, more feuds and political animosities, and consequently less urgency to be found amongst us."²

This same writer, was none the less, of the opinion that conditions in the town had improved and that the police were now more active in controlling the sources of disorder.

"Our play-folk are constrained to keep good hours: ninepins, skittle alleys and whirligigs have been latterly proscribed: hops are denounced as contraband, the language of our streets must bear judicial criticism: disorderly vagabonds must fly to covert: and the wild excursions of our Jack-tars, on their jaded hacks, and wrecks of foundered coaches, are, to the triumph of decency, no longer permissible."³

This magisterial control of public conduct may be associated with the food crisis of the late seventeen-nineties and the early eighteenthundreds.

¹ The Ancient and Modern History of Portsmouth, Portsea, Gosport and their Environs (c 1796-1806).

² Monthly Magazine (1801) p.115

³ Ibid p.114

Graph 4.1

Trials at Portsmouth Quarter Sessions

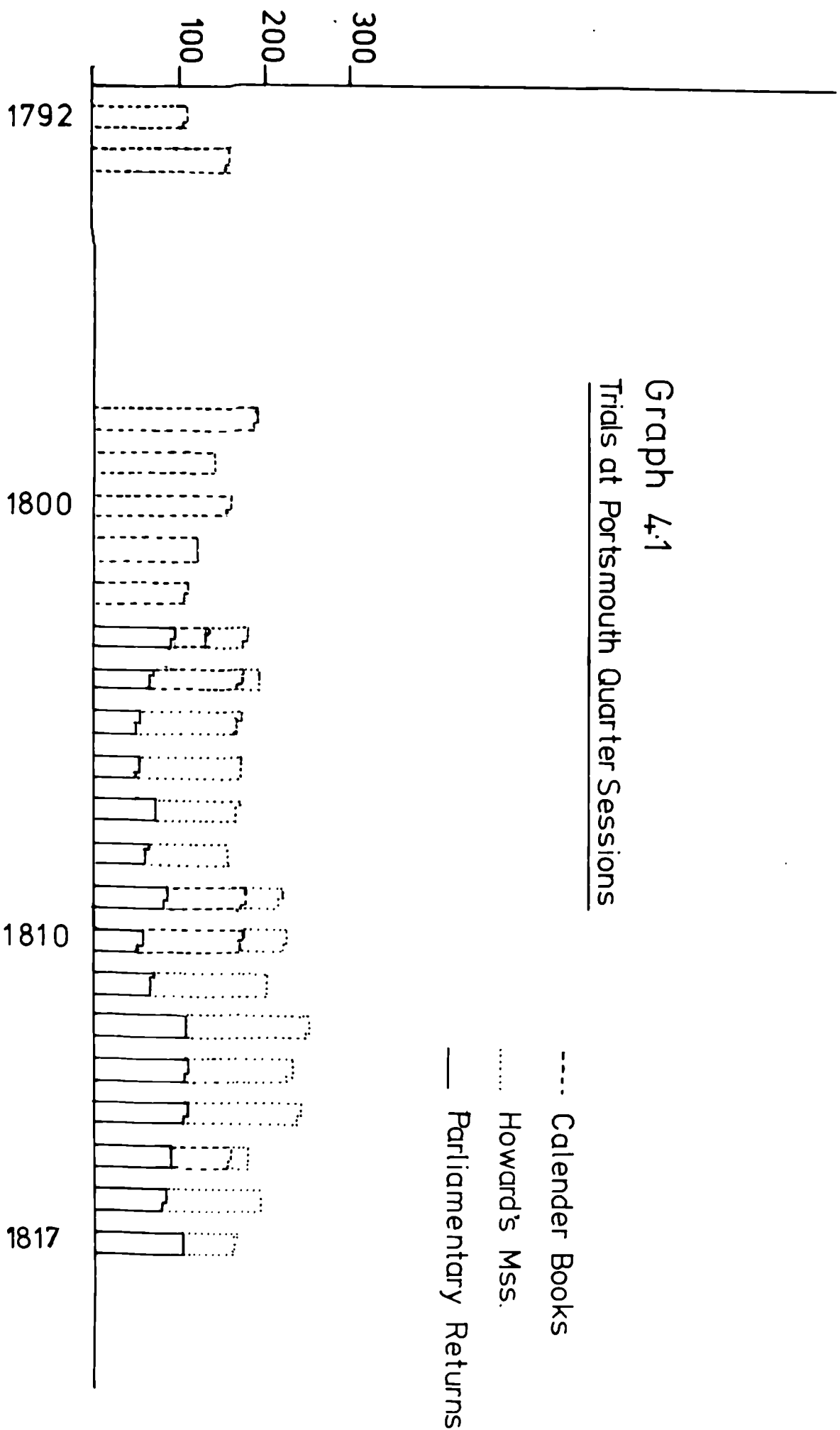
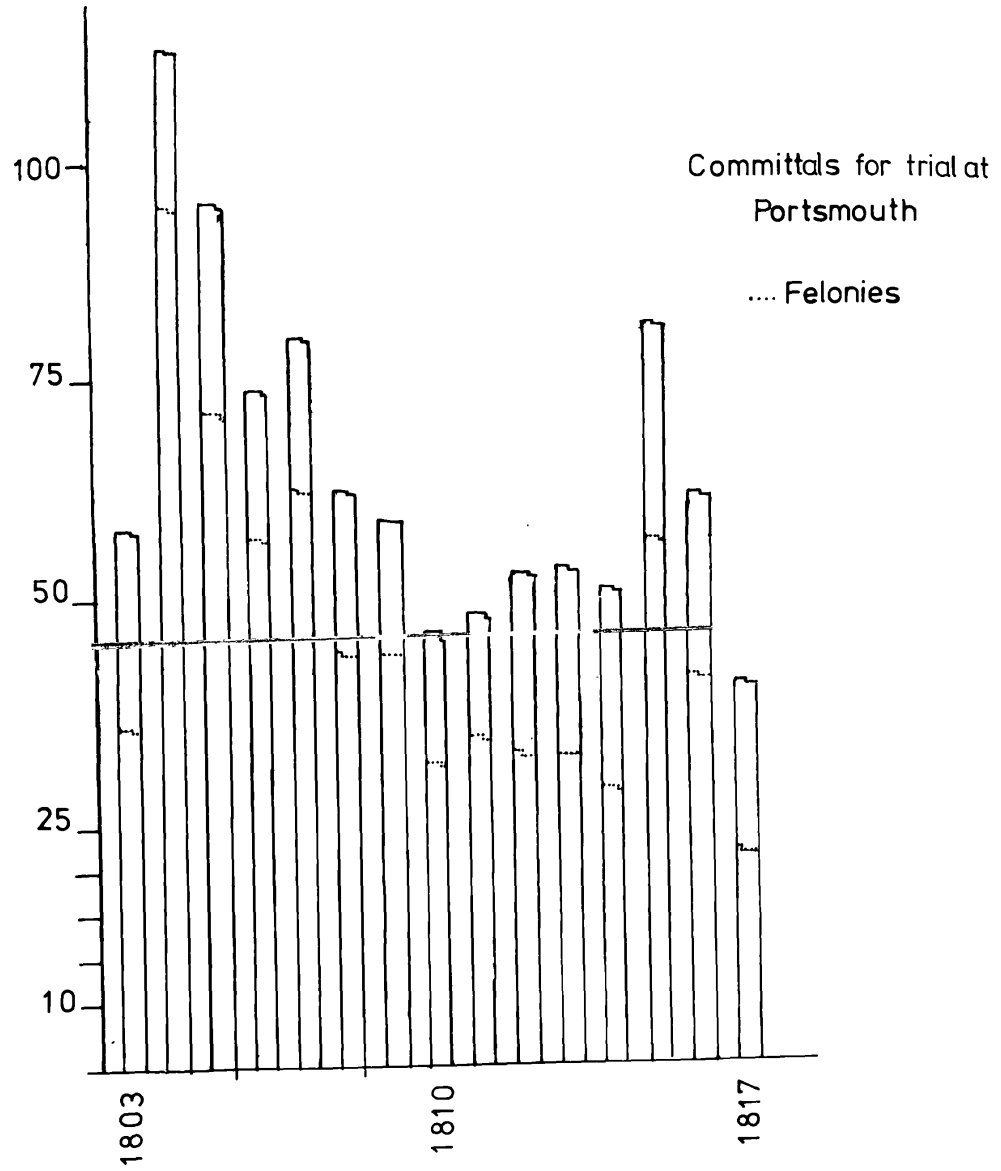


Table 4.9 Committals and trials at the Assize

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	30	13	-	-	-	-	7	-	6	11	7	10	10	10	19		
2			3	2	2	0	0	7	15	15	5	14	13	8	19	19	26
3			10	3	2	-	-	7	10	18	4	14	22	7	19	18	31

1. Number of cases tried at the Assize originating in committals from Portsmouth.
2. Number of committals to the Assize from Portsmouth from the manuscript return.
3. Number of committals to the Assize from Portsmouth from the Parliamentary return.

Graph 4.2



It has been noted elsewhere that an attempt was made to suppress some popular past-times in order to force workingmen to be frugal, but there was concern with public behaviour at other times.¹ In 1798 the Grand Jury thanked the Mayor, who in turn thanked the constables, for the peace and good order of the town, particularly on Sundays.² The observance of the sabbath became a matter of particular concern towards the end of the war. In 1810 the Dissenting editor of the Hampshire Courier complained that Portsdown fair had been open on a Sunday. "We consider" (it), he remarked, "an unfavourable symptom of degenerate morals, and hope such licentiousness will be restrained in future."³ Complaints about the Sabbath being disturbed were made in 1812 and in 1814 when the Church-wardens complained to the Grand Jury about idlers on the streets on Sundays.⁴ In directing the constables to deal with the problem, and in calling on the heads of households and masters to control their families and servants the Recorder lamented, "that the immoral tendency of the lower orders of the rising generation of this town and its vicinity should render such an interference necessary."⁵

In fact, there may well have been some increase in crime and disorder towards the end of the war for in 1814 the Hampshire Telegraph reported:

"The business of the sessions proved the increase in depravity in the town and suburbs; and we are sorry to have to notice, that in many instances it appeared, the temptation to commit depredations was increased by the facilities with which perpetrators could dispose of their plunder."⁶

The well established and extensive network of receivers involved in thefts from the Dock Yard has already been described and there is no reason why at least some of them were not involved in other forms of crime.

1 J. Stevenson. "Disturbances and Public Order in London 1790-1821. (Oxford Univ D.Phil Thesis 1973 p328).

2 P.G. 8.4.1793

3 Hants. Co. 5.8.1810

4 Hants Co. 7.12.1812 Hants. Co. 18.4.1814

5 Hants. Co. 21.3. 1813

6 Hants, Tel 12.6.1814

The end of the war brought a sudden increase in crime and disorder but this was countered by vigorous action by the magistracy. In October 1814 the local newspaper reported:

"Our chief magistrate has made a determination that the town shall be cleared of the numerous idle and dissolute characters who are seen laying about without employment. They are chiefly foreigners and men of colour who have been discharged from the Army and Navy, cannot obtain subsistence in any other service. Some of them have been sent on board the guard ship at Spithead, until they can be conveyed to their own countries."¹

Two months later the newspaper informed its readers that:

"About fifty discharged seamen, foreigners, blackmen and women of abandoned character have been taken into custody this week, for being found prowling about the streets, at midnight and breaking the peace of the inhabitants."²

The campaign continued well into the next year.

"The mayor with a laudable determination to put a stop to the practices of loose women in our streets, on Thursday ordered that all should be committed to the new gaol, who could not shew that they obtained a livelihood in an honest manner. Seventeen of them were apprehended (nine of whom were dressed in the first style of fashion) and examined they were all committed to hard labour - those belonging to these parishes for twenty eight days and those to distant places for seven days, the latter to be afterwards passed home as vagrants."³

Magisterial action was matched by public effort. The private High Street watch established in 1812 was extended in December 1814. A local newspaper was commendatory: "It is much to be wished that the inhabitants of other streets of the town would enter into similar arrangements, which have now become necessary for the preservation of themselves and their property."⁴ In 1816 a spate of robberies led the inhabitants of Mile End to set up another watch.⁵

The statistics for the total number of committals support and supplements what can be inferred from other sources. In all a broad

1	<u>Hants. Tel.</u>	8.10.1814
2	<u>Hants. Tel.</u>	3.12.1814
3	<u>Hants. Tel.</u>	19.8.1815
4	<u>Hants. Co.</u>	19.12.1814
5	<u>Hants. Co.</u>	27.1.1816

pattern in the movement of the level of crime can be suggested for the period from 1803 to the end of the war. It is then possible to interpolate the trend for the 1790's.

What appears to have happened is that the outbreak of hostilities and the return of peace were both marked by an increase in crime but that the level fell in the intervening period until 1812-1813. This pattern was most marked where petty offences were concerned. The decline in crime and disorder may be associated with low price years as the rise in 1812 is probably a response to the cereal shortage of that year. The temporary jump when hostilities begin and cease may reflect the increase in the number of likely offenders in the area, a short-term dislocation of the means of dealing with them, or a more severe attitude on the part of the magistrates in the face of increased disorder. This pattern probably also occurred during the decade 1793 to 1803, with some modification. The initial outbreak of the war may have created a larger influx of people and a more serious challenge to good order than did the end of the short-lived Peace of Amiens in 1803. The food crises of 1795 and 1800 to 1801 were more severe than that of 1812, being accompanied by rioting and, probably, an increase in crime. However, this tendency was checked in the 1800 emergency by a tightening of the means of magisterial control. The rapid demobilisation of 1802 may have caused a sudden but short-lived expansion of disorder.

Overall, the war caused an increase in crime in Portsmouth as compared to peacetime; the local authorities contrasted the two periods in terms of an average of a thousand committals to prison a year for the former as against less than five hundred for the latter.¹ In 1822 one Alderman noted,

¹ P.P. Royal Comm. on Municipal Corporations op.cit.

from the figures for committals, that: "Crime has reached its maximum here and is upon the Decline."¹ Even so, it cannot be concluded that war brought to Portsmouth a marked and steady increase in criminality, nor does the material display the pattern of wartime crime described in a recent article. By assembling crime-prone groups in the vicinity of the town, by creating prosperity for others and by providing opportunities for theft, war was a preconditioning cause for an increase in crime. In this way war had an opposite effect in Portsmouth to that suggested by Beattie in respect of southern London. Beattie thinks that war-time employment reduced crime.^{1a} As has been argued, however, in Portsmouth fluctuations due to price movements could cause fluctuations in the level of crime counter to other trends.²

Attention has been drawn to the social problem that women presented for the town and some of their activities as prostitutes have already been noted.

"Portsmouth has certainly its objects of wretchedness and infamy in common with other places, and some that are to be found in sea-ports only; yet their number is not so great as may be imagined. Their abodes are mostly confined to particular districts, where, though our soldiers, by late regulations of our Lieutenant Governor, are debarred open communication, our jolly tars still seek recreation and amusement."³

It is very difficult indeed to find information about prostitutes and their activities and our remarks must be general. It has not been possible to identify all the areas that were particularly inhabited or worked by the

¹ P.C.R.O. CC 7/51/1

² The response of crime to economic conditions is complex. Here we are only dealing with relatively short run fluctuations and only one economic variable, cereal prices. For a fuller discussion of the movement of criminal statistics in the nineteenth century see K.K. McNab Aspects of the History of Crime in England and Wales between 1805 and 1860 (Sussex Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1965). V.A.C. Gatrell and T.B. Hadden Criminal statistics and their interpretation (A. Wrigley ed.) Nineteenth Century Society (1972) pp336-393

³ Monthly Magazine op.cit. p.215

1a J.M.Beattie The Patterns of Crime in England 1660 1800 Past and Present 62 (1974) pp 45-95

town's whores but they included the Point, Portsea Common Hard and the neighbourhood of Portsmouth poorhouse which was said to be, "a most dissolute area".¹ The women found customers in pubs and gin shops and by walking the streets, leading to the complaint: "Our high street, our walls and our parades are infested by courtesans."² Which indicates that the problem was perhaps more widespread than our first authority would suggest. Prostitutes also operated in brothels and aboard ships. William Cobbett claimed to have seen three hundred harlots on board a single war ship.³ His estimates' reliability is made greater by a more serious account of "immoral practices prevailing in the Navy."⁴ According to this work the women were taken out to the ships by boatmen who took part of their earnings. Some officers attempted to control the whores by enforcing a medical inspection. Other officers were more easy going, only inspecting the women's dress on Sundays when they attended Divine service on the ship. Together with the seamen the prostitutes sought to smuggle alcohol on board and to abuse the Navy's pay system. Seamen were allowed to allot wages to their families and there were instances of fraud in which the money went to the wrong women. Ashore a characteristic scene was a coach full of sailors and women well supplied with drink, dashing around the town.

By the middle of the nineteenth century there were estimated to be six hundred prostitutes in Portsmouth, nearly all living in brothels.⁵ It was said there were more whores in Portsmouth than in any town in England except London and Liverpool and that they went from Portsmouth

¹ W. Brayley and J. Britton op.cit.

² Monthly Magazine op.cit. p.115

³ The Autobiography of William Cobbet ed. W. Reitzel (1947).

⁴ A statement of certain immoral practices prevailing in his Majesty's Navy (1822)

⁵ P.P. 1867-68.

to the other naval ports when ships there were paying off. To obtain an estimate for the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries is impossible. Even the figure quoted above was exceeded by another estimate that was nearer two thousand. Moreover, this figure left out "clandestine" prostitutes, that is, part-timers. It is equally difficult to discover anything about the life history of these women. Some were probably recruited by procuresses, one of whom operated under the guise of a fortune teller. Others were sent direct from the country.

"The officers of a parish bordering on Hampshire, being questioned on the subject, observed, that they always provided for the young women who were likely to become burdensome, by sending them to Portsmouth, from whence they never returned."¹

Other girls may have come from the ranks of the women and families who followed the military and men pressed into the Navy. Indeed it may have been impossible to have distinguished the spouses of servicemen from their common law wives and more casual acquaintances. It is also possible that the daughters of Dock Yard workers were part time prostitutes and it is by no means certain that they would have been socially degraded by being so. It was said of General Bentham, whose duties took him to all the Yard towns, that he had,

"... observed and lamented the depravity of a large proportion of the female population at our great seaports and this was not confined to the very lowest class, but unfortunately extended upwards to the daughters of workmen in the dockyards where they were much exposed to temptation."²

It was also observed, that many of Portsmouth's prostitutes married respectably.³ More generally, Francis Place, remembering the late eighteenth century said:

¹ A Statement op.cit.

² M.S. Bentham The Life of Bentham op.cit.

³ P.P. 186 69 op.cit.

"Want of chastity in the girls was common and was scarcely a matter of reproach in other respects they, as was generally the case, were decent in their general conduct."

Permissiveness, according to Place, was not uncommon even among master tradesmen's families, and,

"... being unchaste did not necessarily imply that the girl was an abandoned person as she would be now and it was not therefore as now an insurmountable obstacle to her being comfortably settled in the world." ¹

In Sheerness, the Resident Commissioner had reason to complain about Yard workers keeping gin shops in their quarters and being visited by prostitutes.² The problem may well be that the witnesses we are using were not familiar with the sexual mores of the lower orders. This contention is supported by the comment of a sympathetic and percipient observer Sir John Carter who advocated the establishment of a female penitentiary in Portsmouth.

"Surely no person on reflection will think it unnecessary who has walked through the populous towns of Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport, and seen the number and wretchedness of those devoted females who earn a precarious subsistence by the most humiliating prostitution and linger out a short and unhappy life, in those haunts of vice and infamy which they inhabit, and many of them torn from the most respectable families, who but for base and unprincipled seduction, might have arrived to a state of intellectual ability."³

Clearly Carter considered prostitutes to be 'declassé', but he also said that they came from respectable homes, driven to prostitution by economic demands, though he refers to them as "devoted". It is unwise to lay too great an emphasis on one word but it does tend to support the contention that many prostitutes may have been the wives or the regular companions of servicemen and others, who did not consider prostitution as degrading as the gentry did.

¹ The Autobiography of Francis Place ed. M. Thale (1972) pp 73,81.

² M.M. 36 (1950) p.92

³ Hants. Co. 4.8.1810

Table 4.10 An analysis of committals to Portsmouth
Quarter Sessions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1803	274	114	388	147	68	215	603
04	726	246	972	111	80	191	1163
05	598	146	744	149	91	240	984
06	374	223	597	93	76	172	769
07	416	235	651	108	63	171	822
08	357	114	471	114	63	177	648
09	344	126	470	113	32	145	615
10	244	100	344	89	55	144	488
11	248	125	373	90	46	136	509
12	266	85	351	152	51	203	554
13	252	98	350	145	63	208	558
14	202	142	314	146	74	220	534
15	418	176	594	179	64	243	837
16	311	131	442	148	53	201	643
17	194	47	241	163	54	217	458

1. Males committed for examination summary process in connection with misdemeanours.
2. Females committed for examination summary process in connection with misdemeanours.
3. Total of persons committed for examination summary process in connection with misdemeanours.
4. Males committed for examination in connection with felonies.
5. Females committed for examination in connection with felonies.
6. Total of persons committed for examination in connection with felonies.
7. Total number of persons committed.

Table 4.11 Women's share of Crime at the Sessions.

	1	2	3	4
1803	31.8	29.4	30	37.2
04	42	25.3	28	25.2
05	37.9	19.6	24	38.4
06	46	36.4	39	26.4
07	36.9	36	36.4	21.2
08	35.6	24.2	27.4	35.6
09	22	26.8	25.1	20.1
10	38.2	29	31.8	35.5
11	33.8	33.6	34	26.6
12	25	24.2	24.6	37.5
13	33	28	28.8	39.2
14	33.8	41	42	34.2
15	25.4	29.6	28.7	26.6
16	26.4	29.6	25.7	28.8
17	25	19.5	22	53.5

Column 1	Women committed for felony as a percentage of all committals for felony.
2	Women committed for misdemeanours as a percentage of all committals for misdemeanours.
3	Women committed for all crimes as a percentage of all committals.
4	Women committed in connection with felony as a percentage of all women committed.

Table 4.12

An analysis of the female share of felonies

	1	2	3
1792	24.2	27.7	54
93	41	49	58.5
98	33.6	40	40
99	29	43	42.9
1800	32.1	30.6	50
01	47	44.5	61
02	29	29.8	52
03	23	23.5	36.4
04	36	51	43.8
09	27	25	35
12	29	22	29
15	24	18	29.5

1. Women's cases as a percentage of total number of cases recorded in the Calendar Books.
2. Women's felonies as a percentage of all felonies
3. Women's felonies as a percentage of all women's cases.

Table 4.13

1790	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	1800	01	02	03
11.8	5.7	12.8	9.7	23	9.75	13.6	8.4	10.3	18.5	11.6	13.6	8.65	11
1804	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15		
22.2	21	14	5.25	11.5	7.25	27	7.5	25	10.3	2.12	7.7		

Number of women indicted at the Assize as a percentage of all persons indicted.

An assessment of the role of females in general crime and disorder is possible by using the statistics that have already been discussed. Though these may be deficient in absolute terms it may be safer to use them for measuring elements aggregated within them. The assumption is that inaccuracy in recording was equal for men and women. On this basis Tables 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13 have been drawn up.

The degree of involvement in crime by women as revealed by these figures is strikingly high. In contemporary society the number of females dealt with by the court is twelve percent of the figure for males.¹ To compare Portsmouth with a more general situation for the period under study is difficult. But, as a rough guide, the Assize figures can be taken, remembering that these are not independent of the figures for Portsmouth. Generally the figures for the county as a whole reveal a much lower involvement of women in crime than the Portsmouth data does; so it would appear that in the latter place females made a substantial contribution to the level of crime and disorder. If it is wished to measure the seriousness of this crime a surrogate measure has to be used. Despite the difficulties of legal classification, the numbers of felonies is the best guide available to the nature of crime. From tracing the level of female felony it would appear that women's crime was nearly as serious as men's.

As the materials are so weak it seems wrong to try to use them to trace over time the changing involvement of women in crime. It can be noted, however, that in the table based on the official returns, 1814 stands out as a maximum figure for the committal of women as a percentage

¹ H. Jones Crime in a Changing Society (1965) p.21

of all committals and that this coincides with newspaper reports about magisterial action against disorderly elements in the town.

Despite the difficulties enough has been said about crime and disorder in Portsmouth to make some of the original hypotheses at least reasonable speculation. It can be said that there was a broad relationship between crime and economic conditions. Also, in Portsmouth's particular circumstances as a naval port and military base, women had a large role to play in deviant activity. However, it cannot be claimed that crime in Portsmouth grew during the war faster than the population or that it overwhelmed the authorities. If anything, taking into account the history of the borough police and of rioting, Portsmouth appears to have been a better controlled and more orderly society at the end of the war than at the beginning.

In summary it can be said that a study of crime in Portsmouth does not reveal any element of social protest in the criminal activity that has been considered. Yard thieves were not abetted because they were waging a primitive form of class warfare but because they were members of a community which was closely involved in embezzlement from the Yard for private economic motives. Unfortunately there is not enough evidence to suggest in what way other criminal activity in the area was perceived, though it has been suggested that prostitution was legitimised to a certain degree.

As for crime being part of a culture of alienation as well as of protest, it has been shown that in some ways the opposite was true. Deviance tied participants into a pre-existing social and economic system shared by members of different socio-economic groups. Clearly, however, some form of crime was part of the experience of many working people in

Portsmouth and was at least tolerated by others. To this extent social criminality really existed. To support this point with one last example. A man accused of receiving stolen tea and sugar for cheap resale to his neighbours claimed in his defence that he did not know that the items were stolen and that he purchased under the impression that they were contraband.¹ How much more of the working classes' domestic necessities were purchased in a market supplied with illegally obtained merchandise is an interesting question. How much of legitimate merchant and tradesmen's stock was similarly obtained is equally intriguing. When some answers have been provided to these questions it may prove possible to reappraise the social and political implication of crime.

Individual crimes against property and persons were clearly part of the everyday experience of Portsmouth's population. More exceptional, and more exciting, were the periodic mass disturbances associated with food shortages and high prices, which we now turn to.

¹ E.G. 21.7.1803.

CHAPTER V FOOD RIOTING AND RADICALISM

Major Disturbances in Portsmouth 1793 to 1815

1973	February	Outbreak of war
1795	April	Militia involved in food rioting, shipwrights enrolled as special constables.
	September	Local Corresponding Society formed.
	November	Agitation against the Two Acts and general political controversy
1796	March	John Binns in Portsmouth
	April	Food Riot and attack on lock up
	July	"Sundry Symptoms of democracy"
	August	Protest against the flogging of a militia-man
	October	Prosecution and dispersal of local radicals
1797	April-May	Spithead Mutiny
1800	January	Bakers combine to raise Assize price of bread.
	February	Threatening notices
	May	Threatening notices
	July	Local supplies of wheat almost exhausted, famine avoided by arrival of foreign wheat.
	August	Assize abandoned as unworkable
		Threatening notices
	September	Demonstration against high prices and a food boycott.
1801	April - May	Major labour dispute in all the Naval Dock Yards
1802	March	Peace of Amiens

During the period 1793 to 1815 food riots and protests over high prices took place in three years: 1795, 1796 and 1800. In examining these events we ask: how did these incidents occur? Did the Dock Yard play any part in them and do the details of these riots lend support to the concept of the "moral economy" as put forward by E.P. Thompson? First, however, it is necessary to outline the structure of the local market in foodstuffs.

Portsmouth had a dual role to play in the corn market. As a port it was a point of entry for imported corn and a collecting place for corn transported by coastal vessels. As a large town and military and naval base it was a centre for consumption. But, because of its site and its nature as a conurbation, Portsmouth was removed from any large grain producing farms by about ten miles. The agricultural land of Portsea Isle was mainly given over to pasture and market gardening. Over a wider area, merchants seeking to supply the town must have found themselves in competition with the suppliers of London who purchased large quantities of corn and barley from the markets of Guildford and Farnham.¹

The processing of grains was done close to the town where there were a number of windmills and a Government tidal mill. It would appear, from the frequency of reference to bakers in the press and rate books, that most people in the town purchased shop bread rather than flour so that the areas mills sold to bakers rather than consumers. There is a little evidence to suggest that the bakers also cooked other foodstuffs for their customers.² The domestic nature of this service must not be allowed to obscure the fact that a number of Portsmouth's bakers were substantial businessmen pursuing a policy of vertical integration,

¹ J.M. Beattie *The Pattern of Crime in England 1660-1800* Past and Present 62 (1974) pp 45-95.

² Hants. Tel. 14.10.1815

extending their economic activities back along the supply chain for grain at least as far as milling.¹ Thus, it seems possible that, in some instances, part of the town's food supply may have been in the hands of the same men from before harvesting until the final sale to the consumer.

1795

1795 has been called the climactic year of food rioting. Early in the year prices had begun to rise sharply with fears about a poor harvest and the realisation that a run of bad years had consumed all surplus stocks. Imports on a large scale were impossible because all European harvests were below average, and pests had ravaged the North American crop. The shortage in England was not relieved until the more normal harvest of 1796 and an influx of foreign grain.² The intervening period was marked by severe rioting.

The first disturbances in Portsmouth occurred on the weekend of the eleventh and twelfth of April 1795. Sir John Carter, the Mayor, informed the Home Office that the trouble had begun just after the market had opened, presumably on the Saturday morning. Men from the Gloucester Militia went to the Butchers and successfully demanded that meat be sold at four pence per pound. No violence took place and the soldiers were persuaded by General Cuyler and his officers to return to their quarters.³ However, in the Evening some militia recruits "... set on by some low people",

¹ Ports. Tel. 8.9.1800

² W.M. Stern The Bread Crisis of 1795-6 Economica new series XXXI (1964) pp. 168-187.

³ P.R.O. H042/34 13.4.1795

created a more serious disturbance. The Hampshire Chronicle said that four to five hundred people had collected in different parts of Portsea, creating so much alarm that houses and shops were instantly shut up. Despite this action, or perhaps provoked by it, the crowd persuaded the butchers and bakers by either entreaty or force, to reopen,

"... when meat of all descriptions was demanded at 4d. per lb, and bread at 6d. per quartern loaf. Those who complied with the demands were paid with exactness the above prices but those who refused had their shops gutted without receiving any more money than the mob chose to leave."

This was the limit of the violence and no one was injured. Disturbances continued next day until nine o'clock in the evening. In consequence, the local newspaper feared:

"Unless some effectual aid is given to the Civil Power it is apprehended that similar depredations will take place, and the consequence is dreadful to contemplate."¹

Carter's account of the riot, sent to the *Home Office*, was not so detailed as the newspaper report but he considered that the looting had been the work of a few.

What was the role of the Dock Yard workers in these disturbances? It is clear that they had nothing to do with the Saturday morning affair, when they were at work, but they would have been free to have joined in the tumult of the evening. That they had done so was the opinion of the army officer commanding the military in the area. Saxton, the Yard Commissioner, was of a different mind. He told the Navy Board that he had been informed of:

"Disturbances intended to be carried on in any of the Markets of the Neighbourhood - But I was so thoroughly persuaded that whatever may be the natural propensities of our shipwrights, - I was sure that at this present moment they would not be concerned in any riotous conduct whatever."²

¹ Hants. Chron. 13.4.1795
² N.M.M. POR/F/21 13.4.1795

For his part, Saxton blamed the militiamen and new recruits for planning and initiating the riots.

Both Saxton and the army general may have been anxious to avoid any censure on account of their subordinates' actions and may have tended to blame the people under the other's command. While the involvement of the militia is clear, the same cannot be said of the Dock workers. On the contrary, it can be shown that the shipwrights played an important part in controlling the disturbances.

The Mayor and the Aldermen were as worried as the local newspaper editor about the need for assistance in keeping the peace and they appealed to the Resident Commissioner. Saxton told the Yard Officers to request the voluntary services of the shipwrights,

"... recommend to them in my name and in that of the Respective Officers of His Majesty's Yard - That by affording such Voluntary Assistance to the Magistrates they will insure the Peace of their Neighbours and prove their detestation of such Practices."¹

In response sixty four shipwrights, headed by their foremen and quartermen, "... enrolled to act with constables staves under the direction of the Magistrates". Consequently Saxton was able to report:

"Although there were a great assembly of soldiers and people - yet there was nothing to call a Riot or violence and several of the military were led home to their Barracks and Quarters by our People."²

The central authorities were thankful to all who had prevented the development of a very dangerous situation; prolonged rioting by civilians and soldiers in military garrison. The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty expressed "... their entire approbation ... for the Prudent Conduct and ready assistance..." of the shipwrights.³ The Home Office,

¹ N.M.M. POR/C/23 13.4.1795
² N.M.M. POR/F/21 14.4.1795
³ N.M.M. POR/C/23 16.4.1795

in its turn, acknowledged the "judicious conduct" of the magistracy and the "aid and intercession of General Cuyler and the officers of the Gloucester Regiment."¹

It would seem fairly certain that the Dock Yard workers were not involved in the riot of 1795 to any serious degree, except in aiding the authorities to suppress the trouble. Nevertheless, a number of other people in the town must have been in the crowd and we have to consider how they were treated in consequence of their actions.

Though the Gloucester Regiment was quickly transferred to another area there is no record of any retribution being taken against individuals, servicemen or civilian.² As far as the working people of Portsmouth were concerned the riot probably had a beneficial effect, serving notice on their wealthier neighbours that their social and economic position was becoming desperate. The local newspaper reported:

"In consequence of the high price of flour, the Bakers of this town and Portsea last week held a Meeting to consider the most effectual means of reducing the same."

At the bakers request the magistrates called a public meeting which appointed a committee to petition Parliament, the bakers volunteering to reduce their price a penny per gallon loaf. After reporting this the newspaper editor went on to comment:

"To preserve the country free from disturbances on account of the high price of butchers meat, etc., those whom such commotions would most eventually concern would do well to endeavour to prevent them in time - a much easier task than curing such disorders. To effectuate this the laws against FORESTALLING ought to be strictly enforced, it needs little argument to prove this to be an evil calling loudly for redress, and we trust that it will be speedily prevented."³

Such statements of conventional wisdom as this support the view that a "moral economy" existed. It was underlined a week later when the claim

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 143/5 14.4.1795

² Hants Ch. 13.5.1795

³ Ports. G. 20.4.1795

was made that forestallers had been holding stocks of potatoes and carrots. A new note was struck, however, when the editor reported food riots elsewhere in the country.

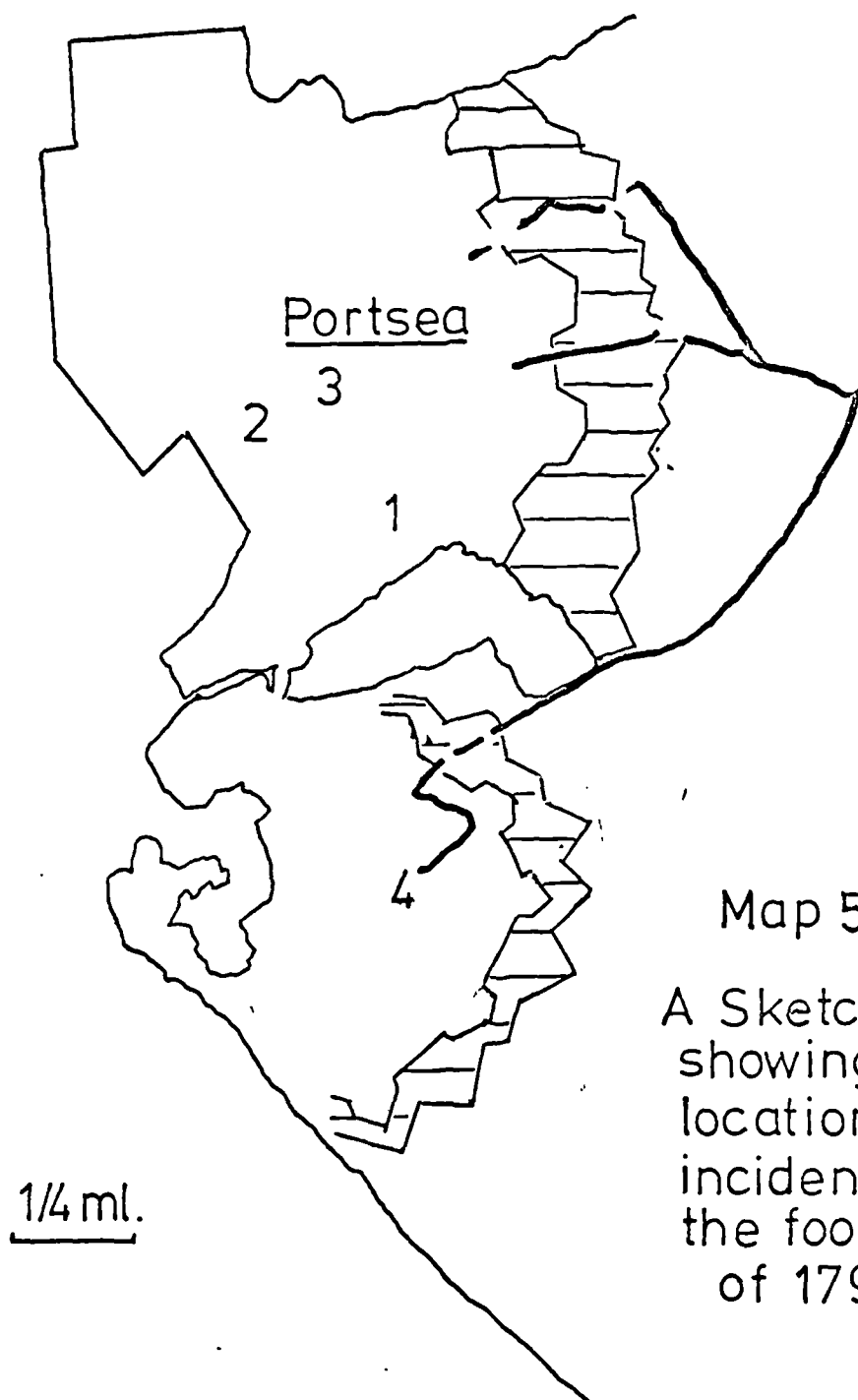
"There is every reason to believe that all these dangerous movements are planned, suggested and supported by a set of men who wish to throw the country into confusion, in order to destroy the property and happiness of those who would maintain the Government and Constitution against the inroads of evil doing and unprincipled innovators."¹

The editor's views could have reflected a number of perceptions of the situation. First, it was, and always is, easy to explain popular mass actions that threaten the established powers, by claiming they are the result of a conspiracy on the part of a few. In the politically charged atmosphere of the mid seventeen-nineties when radical workingmen were seeking an effective political voice, unrest of almost any sort could be imputed to the agitation of revolutionaries. Secondly, E.P. Thompson has contended that such political tensions contributed to a change in attitude on the part of the authorities towards food rioting. However, the Portsmouth magistrates preferred to continue the old tradition of paternalistic control of the market when they announced their intention of strictly enforcing the Act "... for the better regulating of the Assize and making of Bread."²

The riot of 1795 is an almost classic demonstration of the moral economy operating in an urban situation. We are presented with crowd action employing limited violence against specific targets for the particular end of fixing a just price. Apart from the crowd's behaviour, we are shown the generally sympathetic response of the authorities and the use of public measures to relieve the distress caused by high prices and to regulate the market.

¹ Ibid. 27.4.1795

² Ibid. 20.7.1795



Map 5.1

A Sketch Map
showing the
location of
incidents in
the food riot
of 1796

1796

An April evening was again the time of a disturbance caused by high prices in 1796. The Portsmouth Gazette and the Hampshire Chronicle both carried long reports of the affair.

"On Tuesday evening at seven o'clock a number of disorderly people assembled in St. Georges Sq. Portsea (in consequence of a notice affixed at the Dock Yard Gates) and thence proceeded in a body to the house of Sir John Carter, in this place where they stayed about three hours complaining of the price of bread etc. which seemed a pretext for their meeting".

The crowd was made up of workers from the Dock Yard and Victualling Department and only part, about a thousand, went to see Carter, before whom they maintained good order. Sir John Carter promised to do all he could to reduce the price of bread and he requested the crowd to return peaceably to their homes. The crowd, however, expressed its determination to rejoin their compatriots in Portsea.

" - On their reaching the house of Mr. Stignant in Havant St., they began demolishing the front and in a short time forcibly entered the shop, from whence they took near £100 in cash, a great part of the goods, and did much other mischief. Mr. Snook in Queens Street was also a considerable sufferer, his windows all being broken and several other bakers sustained more or less damage. Neither the civil or military powers were ordered to curb the licentiousness of this misguided rabble."¹

Whether the crowd was misguided may be a matter of opinion, but reference to a map shows that they were far from a rabble. Considerable planning and forethought must have gone into collecting the crowd in St. Georges Sq., Portsea, and then moving part of it out of that town and along the main road into Portsmouth to the house of Sir John Carter. Apparently, throughout this manoeuvre, neither the procession nor the crowd left in the square created trouble, though from the first meeting to the

¹ Ibid. 2.5.1796

return to the square five hours must have elapsed. Three hours of argument with Carter must have sorely tried the patience of the protestors. So long a confrontation indicates that Carter was not so willing as the newspaper suggested to meet the crowd's demands. One would like to know exactly what the demonstrators wanted done. Perhaps they had specific proposals to which Carter would only reply in the most general terms, promising only to do what was possible. Even so, the crowd did not immediately go on the rampage but returned to Portsea and directed their attention towards some of the town's biggest bakers in the town's most salubrious thoroughfare, Queens Street. Moreover, the previous August, one of the crowd's targets, John Snook, had been the subject of serious rumours that he was adulterating his flour and engaging in other "nefarious practices".¹

The crowd probably did not riot in Portsmouth because they were within the walls of the garrison and troops were easily available. The general discipline of the crowd's actions and the appeal to the authorities are probably the hallmark of the involvement of the Dock Yard workers. This is the only war-time tumult for which there is unequivocal evidence of the involvement of the Yard People. However, because of the very lack of discipline there is no reason to think that the Yard workers were not involved in the events which followed the Queen Street riot.

Emboldened, perhaps, by their success the previous day the crowd collected again on Wednesday evening. The crowd was very large and the "mobility" were said to number five thousand. This time the magistrates were not totally unprepared and had sworn in a number of special constables. Even so, the crowd assembled before the constables could be summoned. Having thus lost the chance to break up the crowd before it became too

¹ P.G. 18.8.1795

large the peace officers were faced with a serious situation. This they tried to resolve by lodging three ring leaders in the local lock up known as the cage. Incited the crowd attacked the gaol in an attempt to rescue their comrades.

"The Magistrates then called up the Buckingham Militia and the Yeoman cavalry, read the riot act, and ordered them to disperse the mob. Several of them were under the necessity of firing before they would disperse, two persons who were observed to have been particularly busy in destroying the Cage were taken into custody, and sent to Portsmouth Gaol under strong guard. The greatest praise is due to the officers and men on this occasion who conducted themselves with a cool demeanour and determined manner: they are under arms and marching to Portsea, where it is reported that the mob is intend to assembling again. We are, however, happy to say that tranquility is now perfectly restored."¹ (SIC)

The size and seriousness of the riot in Portsea appears to have caused considerable alarm. Judging from the newspaper account the Magistrates did ~~not~~ even allow the customary hour to elapse between the reading of the Riot Act and ordering the military into action. The fact that the military were mobilised so swiftly suggests they were possibly prepared for trouble; it would have been too dangerous for the magistrates to have deliberately allowed the riot to develop so as to make an effective example of a few rioters. Rather, events nearly got out of control and the authorities were surprised by the ferocity of the crowds reaction to the arrest of the leaders: their mistake was that having made arrests the culprits were not lodged securely within the garrison but thrown into the local lock up.

The newspaper reflected the general alarm in calling for firm dealings with the arrested,

"... they should be taught, by the loud voice of Magisterial authority that they have no right to take the law into their own hands which has been delegated to others."²

¹ Hants. Chron. 30.4.1796

² P.G. 2.5.1796

For its part, the Home Office was so calm about events in Portsmouth one wonders whether they were fully informed.

"His Grace, (Charles Greville told the Mayor in referring to the Duke of Portland), has great reason to hope from the exertion and vigilance which you have, together with Sir John Carter manifested in this instance, that there will not be a necessity for the interference of a Military Force. Should however, any future circumstances require their assistance, you may rely upon the support of his Majesty's Government in the maintenance of the civil authority."¹

As the Militia had been used to end the disturbances this letter suggests that either the Secretary of State was not aware of this or that he was proposing a wider use of the army as a policing force. Those whose property was damaged may not have been as happy about the magistrates' handling of the disturbances as the Home Office. Two of the bakers whose premises had been attacked in the first demonstration sought compensation from the Mayor in office at the time and another magistrate.² However, this may only have been an attempt to obtain recompense under the Riot Act as compensation of nearly £400 was eventually awarded against the entire Hundred of Portsdown.³

Besides highlighting the role of Portsmouth's magistrates in suppressing the disturbance and raising questions about the involvement of the Yard workers the incidents of 1796 are also worth considering in relation to the concept of the moral economy. Several weeks before the riots it had been noted in the local press that "an astonishing fall in the price of wheat" had occurred locally owing to a halt of exports because of a Parliamentary enquiry.⁴ But a fortnight later it was reported:

"Wheat advanced at our market on Thursday evening from twelve pounds to fifteen guineas a load. We are at a great loss to what to attribute this when the large stock in hand is so well known."⁵

¹ P.R.O. H.O./43/7 30.4.1796

² P.C.R.O. 11/A/20/87

³ P.G. 14.8.1797

⁴ Hants. Chron. 9.4.1796

⁵ Ports. G. 25.4.1796

These reports and rumours of adulteration may have contributed to the anger of the crowd. In this respect it may be significant that at least one of the bakers was also a miller.¹ It would be useful to know more about the other tradesmen subjected to the crowd's hostility. If the crowd did suspect that market manipulations were responsible for the high prices then their actions would in part have conformed to the "moral economy". However, there is no evidence to suggest that the crowd sought to fix a just price or that what the newspaper called 'looting' covered the ritualised distribution of goods and cash. Comparing the newspaper description of this riot with that of 1795, when price fixing did take place and was noted almost approvingly by the press, it can be seen that in 1796 there was no suggestion that the crowd was justified. Nor are the evil machinations of speculators publically avowed. It seems clear that by mustering in strength and attacking the lock up the crowd's actions went beyond the behaviour sanctioned by traditional norms. Therefore, they forfeited the usual restraint and sympathy, shown on other occasions, by the authorities and press.

What has been shown is how the "moral economy" could break down and how, in such a situation, the authorities had to turn to the military for help in maintaining public order and the subordination of the crowd. The pressures that broke through the ritual pattern of crowd protest were several. First, there was the size and extent of the protest, which included the Dock Yard workers. This removed an important prop from the magistrates, for they could not rely on the general support of the populace of Portsea, nor the specific aid of the shipwrights who had acted as special constables the previous year. There is no evidence to suggest

¹ Trade Directory op.cit.

that help from the Dock Yard was either offered or asked for. The delay in collecting the special constables may indicate that they had to come from some distance, perhaps from Portsmouth. Further, social tensions in Portsea may have been increased by labour disputes in the Yard and political agitation by a group of radicals. There were also a number of shipwrights from the Thames Yards in the town; their discontent and predilection for strong, sometimes violent, protest, has been described, and they may have had a role in the street disturbances.

In all, 1796 was probably the most disturbed year that Portsmouth had to experience in the French Wars. The April food riot was the most serious challenge that the authorities had to face. It was one of the few times that the military had to be used to keep order.

1800

A harsh winter and two bad harvests created a situation in 1799 - 1800 similar to that of 1795. Imports were once again impaired, this time because grain dealers feared that the Government would repeat its action of 1795 and intervene in the market.¹ This fear may be the reason why the Government denied, early in 1800, that it was purchasing grain.²

The situation in Portsmouth was summarised by a report on the 1800 harvest by the Customs officials.³ A promising harvest had proved disappointing after threshing and great distress had only been avoided by the

¹ W.M. Stern op.cit.

² Ports. Tel. 19.1.1800

³ Customs 58/33/38 4.11.1800

arrival of foreign wheat. Lack of rain had reduced the barley crop and potatoes, though plentiful, were of poor quality. Even the hay had been spoiled by being harvested too soon. The outlook for the following winter was clearly bleak. In fact national average wheat prices reached record levels until a good harvest and large imports reduced them in 1801.

If 1796 saw the most serious rioting in Portsmouth, the 1800 disturbances prompted a greater consideration of the marketing system and led to a flourishing of the "moral economy". Unrest occurred throughout the year but was concentrated in the first months and at harvest time. Spring may have lessened the deprivation of the poor by bringing better weather. Hopes of a good harvest may have relieved social tensions.

In January, in contrast to the usual situation, the bakers refused to make loaves unless the Assize price was raised. This highlights the shortcomings of the administration of the Assize of Bread. If properly operated the bakers should not have objected to the price set by the Assize as it was supposed to be regulated by the price of wheat. Of course what concerned many bakers was the price of flour which was not restricted. In fact, one historian has written:

"The provincial magistrates calculated the cost of the baker's raw material from sales of stuff which he never baked on a market which he rarely visited."¹

The Portsmouth magistrates were to demonstrate their own reservations about the Assize system later in the year. It was a temptation to the Justices to underprice bread for social reasons. Anyway the Portsmouth bakers protest was successful in as much as the Magistrates agreed to subsidise the price of bread. From what source the subsidy came is not

¹ C.R. Fay *The Miller and the Baker A note on Commercial Transition* Cambridge Historical Journal I 1923-5 pp 85-91.

explained but its payment demonstrates the authorities anxiety about controlling food prices. Their action was carefully explained in handbills. The editor of the Portsmouth Telegraph was probably expressing a popular feeling when he called for the bakers to be prosecuted for combination.¹ Even so, the bakers did not have everything their own way. Early the next month four Portsmouth bakers were fined by the Mayor for selling loaves short of their proper weight. A few weeks earlier a regrator had been fined £20 at the Quarter Sessions for trying to speculate in food stuffs. The Gazette commented:

"We trust that this conviction will operate as a lesson to many who are constantly in the habit of committing the same offence (and hitherto with great impunity) to the great injury of the inhabitants who are obliged by this iniquitous practice to pay from ten to twenty per. cent advance on many commodities they purchase in the market."²

However, such a paternalistic regard for the consumer did not prevent a threat of direct action on the part of the crowd. On the twenty second of February, William Goldson, the Mayor, warned the Home Office that a written paper had been posted up near the Dock Yard wall. A similar action heralded the riot of 1796. The notice was removed by a constable and a copy was forwarded to London. It threatened:

Death


To any that taketh this down.
 We put it up for the good of the town.
 Farmers, Millers, Bakers, Shopkeepers likewise.
 Once in your lifetime by fools be advised.
 In the lowering of provision it is the best thing.
 A shocking sight it would be to be hung at your door.
 You can not expect no other by starving the poor.
 If you do not lower it by next market day.
 You will soon have the devel to pay.
 When it begins you must all stand clear.
 For not one of us will anything fear.

¹ Ports. Tel. 6.1.1800
² Ports. G. 20.1.1800

Besides threatening the traditional enemies of the crowd, this warning also included general retailers. It prompted Goldson to swear in a hundred special constables, though he felt that no further measures were necessary.¹ The local newspaper concurred.

"A number of extra constables were sworn in yesterday, and other necessary precautions taken, to nip in the bud any riotous or tumultuous appearance. Should there be any person so weak or tumultuous as to attempt to disturb the public peace. And it is hoped that all loyal and well disposed people will use their utmost endeavours not only to prevent riot or tumult, but to bring to Justice and punishment all such evil disposed persons as may assist or encourage any mob or unlawful meeting."²

In any event, either because Goldson's action anticipated and so prevented a riot or because none was intended, no disturbance took place. The Home Office, while approving Goldson's arrangements, suggested that he should go further by employing some "discreet and confidential Agents to catch poster stickers".³ If Goldson adopted this tactic it met with limited success. In May another notice had to be removed from the same place as the first. Apparently written by the same person as the previous warning, it was curiously illustrated:

Farmer, Baker, Butchers Likewise.  horn
 An example there is put before your eyes.
 It is the pride of your heart to see the poor starving.
 You that have got plenty do not care a farthing.
 As for the horse likewise the Carter.
 It is high time they were taken the head shorter
 In lowering 6d they would soon rise two.
 They do it to try the poor what they will do.
 These Big dons will just as they please.
 They would make the poor believe the moon is green cheese.
 If the yard will all be true to stand to these Rules.
 We will soon Let them know who is the largest fools.

Ditto 2000

W.C.⁴

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 42/49 22.2.1800
² Ports. G. 22.2.1800
³ P.R.O. H.O. 4.3./17 26.2.1800
⁴ P.R.O. H.O. 42/50 15.5.1800

There is a definite, if veiled, political tone to this warning of decapitation to the "Big dons" and the Carters. Moreover there is a direct appeal to the Yard workmen. Goldson responded by taking the same precautions as in the previous February. In cooperation with Commissioner Saxton he set a watch to try to catch whoever was putting the notices up.

Besides supplementing the police the authorities were inspired to take action of a different nature. At the court leet Mayor Goldson, in his charge to the jury, instructed them to be especially diligent. Because of high prices and general poverty they had to search out traders giving short measure, engrossers, regrators and combinations to raise prices. One wonders if the Mayor had the bakers in mind when he was considering this last instruction. In a highly paternalistic manner the jury was also charged with ensuring that the constables were enforcing the J.P.s orders prohibiting skittles, bowls and gaming in ale and victualling houses, so as to prevent poor men wasting their money.¹ By appearing to be taking action to control the market the Mayor may have hoped to defuse tensions arising from high food prices. The Portsmouth Gazette also tried to calm the situation. According to the paper high prices were due to the weather, and:

"... instead of giving way to the repinings of ineffectual discontent we should endeavour to cherish sentiments of gratitude for the present auspicious season which gives us an earnest of that relief at as early a period as the regular course of nature will allow."²

In short the populace were invited to count their blessings. However, these blessings were fast running out. In July Goldson reported that the bakers were again acting in conjunction. This time they were presenting a

¹ Ports. Tel. 21.5.1800
² Ports. G.

memorial, warning the authorities that they might be forced to cease food production in a few days because of the shortage of flour.

The bakers claimed that the general shortage of grain was aggravated locally by the Government purchasing all the British wheat that came to market for military and naval use. Foreign wheat was available only in small quantities and was of low quality. The Government, they said, was holding eight thousand sacks of flour and six months supply of biscuit. A thousand sacks a flour were consumed a week by the Victualling Department's bakery and, they stressed, it took more flour to make biscuits than bread. The Bakers requested that the manufacturing of biscuits be stopped, as was normal at this time of year.

Apparently the bakers overstated their case, for Goldson was able to establish that the Government held only three months supply of biscuit in store locally. Also, it seems that the quality of the flour used by the Navy was lower than that used in the making of bread for civilian consumption. Seamen's biscuit was of flour made from the residue of the grain after the extraction of firsts and seconds, the grades normally used by bakers. If the Navy was competing with the bakers for raw materials it must be concluded that either the Navy was baking better biscuit than normal or that Portsmouth's bakers were using a lower quality flour than was the case elsewhere. However, the general purport of the bakers' memorial was borne out by Goldson's investigation of flour stocks, intended purchases and the likelihood of further supplies,

"by which I find that it is impossible to obtain any Quantity that can be considered as any ways equal to even the most scanty subsistence for the inhabitants."

Faced with imminent famine, Goldson, in requesting instructions and aid from the Secretary of State for Domestic Affairs, expressed the fears

that must have been felt by all of his class:

"The population of a Seaport town being composed of various descriptions of people, a great part of whom from their situation can not be expected to reason as to the causes of things, but having no property to lose are easily led by the impulse of their passions to join in any disturbance, Your Grace must naturally conclude that everything is to be apprehended from a want of bread - "1

About a week later the Mayor informed the Home Office that the crisis would be over in two to three weeks as a large supply of foreign corn had arrived. The situation could be further eased if the Government used its own stocks to feed the troops quartered in the locality. Sir John Carter also wrote, underlining Goldson's recommendations and reporting on the situation at Gosport, as the justice there was away. The bakers there were having to sell bread straight from the oven so as to avoid violence on the part of their Customers. The Government had responded to Portsmouth's request and the Victualling Offices production of bread had ceased bringing relief not only to the vicinity of the town but also to the areas where the grain had been produced. In fact, there was now no need for the Government to supply the troops with meal.²

In late August the situation was good enough for the magistrates to suspend the Assize of Bread, though they may have been influenced by other considerations than price levels.³

"The Mayor and Magistrates after due consideration, have this day determined for the present to desist from setting an Assize of Bread, being fully satisfied that they thereby consult the interest of the public."⁴

The magistrates' actions were explained by a commentator in terms of dissatisfaction with the law as it stood. The writer implied that what they objected to was not regulating prices but the mode of doing it. In

1 P.R.O. H.O. 19.5.1800

2 P.R.O. H.O. 42/50 9.7.1800

3 J.S. Girdler Observations on the Pernicious Consequences of Forestalling, Regrating and Ingrossing (1800) p.111

4 Ports. Tel. 8.1800

fact they would have preferred an Assize of Flour.

The response of the general populace to the end of price control was almost immediate showing that they judged the matter by different criteria than the Justices. Early September saw large meeting protesting about high prices on four nights running. The first two were dispersed by the magistrates without incident. The authorities were forewarned by a written notice and they had enrolled fifty special constables additional to the hundred and twenty sworn six months earlier. The fourth night of protest turned into a minor riot.¹ The Gazette reported:

"On Wednesday evening a great number of persons assembled in St. Georges Square Portsea (written bills having been previously put up inviting a meeting on account of the advance of the price of bread).

The magistrates, with about 50 extra constables, attended and the Mayor addressed the multitude, pointing out to them the impropriety as well as the illegality of their conduct and explaining the ill consequence of meetings of this description, and warning them of the punishment attendant on their present conduct. The Mayor, Sir John Carter etc. desired them to then disperse and return quietly to their homes, a few (5 men and 1 woman) disregarding the salutary advance were apprehended and lodged in prison all of whom, except one were liberated on giving bail to answer for their conduct at the next quarter sessions for this borough.

We much regret that persons should rashly precipitate themselves into offences of the above description. Riot and Disorder must ever retard what Moderation and peaceable Demeanour will tend to effect."²

The fact that four out of the five people arrested were given bail may indicate that their offence was not serious and also that the parties were of great enough substance and respectability to be allowed out of jail. This is probably related to the fact that this whole series of demonstrations had been organised by the Dock Yard workers. However, the Yard People do not appear to have been trying to put pressure on the authorities by threatening to create disorder. They publically disclaimed any such idea. This statement was not just a gesture designed to hide their real motives, for the Yard's workers had an alternative tactic to violence.

¹ P.T. 1.9.1800
P.G. 31.8.1800
² Ports. G. 1.9.1800

"The artificers etc. of the Dock Yard have published a paper, in which, after reprobating all idea of rioting or violation of property they subscribed to the following resolution.

That we and our families will abstain from making any use of butter, cream, milk and potatoes, when the market price of butter shall exceed nine pence per pound - cream in proportion, milk at two pence per quart and potatoes at sixpence per gallon."

Further reassuring statements were made.

"Property is sacred. We abhor and detest all proceedings which disturb the public peace, and if required we shall assist in preserving it ..."¹

The notable exceptions from the list of goods boycotted by the Yard people were bread and flour; probably because they could obtain these items from their own mill and bakery. The boycott was enforced rigorously and a man who broke it was 'horsed' around the Dock Yard and Portsea. For their part, the magistrates made a number of prosecutions for short weight and regrating.

The lack of tension and the small likelihood of serious trouble occurring in Portsmouth during 1800 was even reflected by the Home Office, which did not make its usual demand for strong action.

"From your local situation you will be best Judge (the Mayor was told with reference to those who had been arrested), whether under all the circumstances it will be more advisable to indict those Persons at the Session or only to require them to find security for their good behaviour."²

Not everybody in the town was a supporter of moderate action nor placated by newspaper demands for the prosecution of speculators. Another poster appeared, this time at the Town Gates and accompanied by three halters. It ran:

A Caution

To the Farmers, Millers and Bakers
Here three you see,
Each of you take your choice
The greatest Rogue
May have the greatest hoist.

¹ Ports. G. 25.8.1800

² P.R.O. H.O. 43/12 29.8.1800

At another gate, "woe to the land of oppression" was chalked on the wall.¹ As a military guard was posted at both places some awkward questions were raised about the loyalty or efficiency of the soldiers. It was decided to court martial the sergeants of the guard. As no proof of any sort could be found against them they were not actually tried. Another poster was found in the town with a tone similar to those which had been put up earlier in the year.

Repent before too late, the time is drawing nigh.
 There's no repentance in Eternity:
 Yet we are friends to all Humanity
 You grind us so our children cant get Bread
 Consider this before you lose your Head
 You have heard of Buonaparte and his Fame
 Cause not the like in England to reign,
 The Halters made,
 The time is near at Hand
 That you must make
 Your exit from the Land
 Old England ²

Perhaps, it was the combination of doubts about the military, the continued postering, with the expression of radical sentiments and riots elsewhere in the county, that persuaded the magistrates to act publicay and firmly to prevent disturbances and catch the agitators.

Goldson told the Home Office "As Riots are often excited by neighbouring examples I have thought it necessary to take some immediate and decisive step." The Mayor offered a £50 reward and a free pardon to any one who could help detect the anonymous writer. The Duke of Portland approved of this and arranged to have the reward advertised in the London Gazette. For their part, the local authorities had handbills printed and circulated.

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 42/51 18.9.1800

² A. Geddes op.cit. p.21

"The Mayor and magistrates being fully satisfied that in almost every riotous Assembly there are many persons who are peaceably inclined, but who continue on the spot merely as Spectators, requesting that in the Event of any Disturbance in the towns, such peaceable persons will confine themselves to their own houses unless called upon to aid the Civil Power. And as Every Attempt to riot only tends to prevent persons coming to Market, and to keep up the high Price of Provision, they further give this

Public Notice

That they are determined to resist by force any attempt that may be made to assemble any body of persons together, and that they will indiscriminately take every Person into custody who shall so assemble and proceed against them with the utmost severity of the Law.

Guildhall

September 18th 1800

By Order of the
Mayor and Magistrates
Barney Town Clerk ¹

In case the warning and public appeal failed, Goldson took other precautions.

"In addition to the constables and others sworn in on former occasions the Master Shipwright of His Majesty's Yard has very handsomely offered to arrange the Artificers who are to be trusted under his own immediate inspection and that of the other officers under him, so that they may be of use whenever called on."²

The Mayor, once more mixed firm sensible anticipation and reasonableness in an attempt to forestall trouble and he appears to have been supported in this by many townsfolk. The magistracy in Portsmouth were never left to deal with trouble by themselves, as they sometimes were in other areas. Goldson and his fellow magistrates appear to have had a fairly sophisticated attitude towards the crowd as rioters, drawing a distinction between those who participated actively in the disturbance and those who were on the fringe of the riot as spectators. This attitude may reflect a realisation that trouble could be started by a small nucleus of people and that the way the situation developed could depend on how many

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 43/12 29.8.1800

² Ibid.

followed their lead. If this assumption about the Mayor's thinking is correct, this analysis fits some modern considerations of riotous behaviour. Goldson's hope may have been to isolate any potential rioting nucleus. As it was, the Mayor was sure that no serious trouble was likely, though he probably welcomed the offer of additional help from the Dock Yard.

Presumably, when the Master Shipwright proposed to enrol workmen from the Yard who could be trusted he had the arrangements of 1795 in mind, when a number of shipwrights were sworn in as special constables. The inference might be drawn from the above passage that some Yard employees were not to be trusted. This is perhaps supported if the activities of the ropemakers and riggers in relation to thefts from the Yard are considered. In any case the next poster was addressed generally to the Yard workers. Again this poster appeared near a military post, but Goldson was convinced that the soldiers had no hand in it.

Portsea Town, Portsmouth & Vicinity

Gentlemen of the Dock Yard

I as an inhabitant of this unfortunate Isle of Britain can no longer bear to view with patience the villainous Transactions of the Great Men of the Country, Gentlemen, you as well as me have patience or else you could not go to Dock working & slaving & the Miller, Farmer and Statesmen, enjoy the fruits of your labour. Why don't you act like Men & show your self worthy of the name of Freeman born in a land of Liberty, instead of that you are Abject Slaves, look around you & behold the people of Britain struggling for their rights. Almost all of the Country at this is in Arms that Aristocratic Place Southampton have had the Spirit to redress themselves by dint of Courage which I am sorry to say my townsmen are not possessed with. Rouse yourself as People from their Lethargy & redress yourself wives and Family or perish for their Sakes What have we to fear the Militia will not fight against us nor one Quarter of the Volunteers if they do you have three thousand & we can get double the number to join them & arms we can find plenty in the Gun Warf.

P.C. this is to give his worship notice that if he don't mind what he is about he will have his head fixed in them halts at Lion Gate

or live in some other manner. So take care Britains Can you thus
behold your Right Invaded & Country Sold. No one more Glorious
Struggle let us make & if we fall let us perish for her sake

signed by a Company of Determined men ¹
[twenty nine crosses]

Despite this call to arms and: "A paper of similar tendency ... but
in another handwriting ...", the authorities were not over-alarmed, though
precautions were taken. The inhabitants of the area were instructed to
watch and ward. Posters were put up advertising the reward for information
about the anonymous writers. Also, the army thought it proper to strengthen
security arrangements on the Gun Wharf²

Events similar to those in Portsmouth were occurring across the water
in Gosport, where inflammatory papers were also being put up in the night.
The Home Office recommended that Mr. Curry, the magistrate there, should
employ some "trustworthy Agents" to try and detect the poster stickers. The
magistrates reported, however, that all was quiet in the area as a whole,
and that the town was patrolled by a strong watch.³ No attempt on the
Gun Wharf took place, not even a demonstration in the streets. As suddenly
as the trouble arose it disappeared. Apart from alerting the authorities
and causing excited talk in the town, it is difficult to gauge what effect
this battle of words had on the inhabitants of Portsea and Portsmouth.
Though prices remained wickedly high, the area around the town continued
to be calm. The Duke of Portland, thankful to have one less worry in such
troublesome times, wrote to William Goldson, whose term of office ended on
Michaelmas:

"I can not suffer you to go out of the Mayoralty without assuring you
that I shall always retain a due sense of the many proofs you have

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 42/51 8.9.1800
² P.R.O. H.O. 42/51 23.9.1800
P.R.O. H.O. 43/12 26.9.1800
³ P.R.O. H.O. 42/51 28.9.1800

given me of your zeal and attention to the public welfare, during the time that you have held that office."¹

Compared to the handling of a similar situation in 1796, Goldson's action in the face of serious unrest over food prices appears to have been adroit, being based on the principle of anticipating trouble and taking steps to prevent it. Perhaps the events of 1796 had made the Portsmouth magistracy more aware of the need for preventive police action than they had been before that date.

In reviewing what has been said so far in the light of the three original questions a number of points can be made. Taking the problem of the involvement of the Dock Yard workers first, it is clear that, at times, they became greatly concerned about the price of food and took steps to make their feelings known. The Yard People organized street demonstrations and confrontations with the magistrates, and also used a boycott. Even so, there is not enough evidence to say indisputably that the Yard workers used violence, or the threat of violence, to gain their ends. The difficulty is that of penetrating contemporary hold-all categories such as "mob" and "rabble" and of putting faces to the crowd. Similarly the terms "Yard People" or "Artificers of the Dock Yard" are vague aggregate phrases not indicating which part of a varied and large labour force is meant. Sometimes one gains the impression that these terms are almost synonymous with shipwrights. Contemporary observers may well have drawn an unspoken distinction between shipwrights and other naval employees. It was to the shipwrights that the authorities looked to reinforce their power. Perhaps it was this willingness to lend aid to the civil powers that earned Portsmouth a reputation for a servile acquiescence to authority, on the one

¹ P.R.O. H.O. 43/12 24.9.1800

hand, and aristocratic superiority on the other. Yet, we have demonstrated that the Yard labour force had considerable consumer consciousness and it can be shown how this operated in contexts other than protests over high food prices.

The Dock Yard had its own tap house, the running of which was a perk of the Yard Porter. When St. Vincent separated these functions, a new tapster was appointed who tried to change the contract. Saxton intervened to prevent this because it created,

"... a considerable commotion in the Yard ... in so much (That love beer and drink as they do) they absolutely forebore drinking and the Tap was for a short time actually shut up ..."

This consumers strike calls to mind the boycott that the Dock Yard workers had organised in the previous year. The Commissioner suspected that the contract had been changed in order,

"... to put money into the Pockets of Individuals and obtain for a Pecuniary Consideration - What is called The Good Will of the Tap. And I deem it my indispensable Duty to resist anything that wore the appearance of trafficking with the Peoples Provisions - And above all not to hazard the stirring up any discontent or disturbance in the yard on any such ground." (SIC)

The tapster, who was trying to give the contract to Sir John Carter, claimed that Saxton wished the contract to remain unchanged for personal reasons. Saxton was given a lecture on the principles of Laissez Faire by the Admiralty.

"In any regulations relative to the Tap, it ought to be an established principle, that any measure which might lead to a monopoly, should as much as possible be discouraged, as by bearing the Tapster at liberty to employ whom he pleased, a fair competition might be created - and while it enabled him to attend to his own Interest, would place him in a situation of responsibility for the quality of the Articles allowed to be sold by him to the Artificers for their Consumption in the Dock Yard."

In the face of such invincible free enterprise logic, and Admiralty authority, the Commissioner had to surrender, apparently without any ill

consequences.¹

It seems clear that the supply of "provisions" was recognised, locally at least, as a very sensitive issue. The Admiralty should have been aware of this. In 1795 the Yard people had complained to them of the "Fraudulent Impositions" of bakers and millers. As to the temper of the shipwrights and other workmen the local magistracy appears to have been a better judge than the Dock Yard Officers. The latter, it should be remembered, stood in a different relationship to the workers than did the corporation. The Yard authorities had to deal with the men as adversaries in labour disputes which, however, never spilled over into the town. As Sir John Carter said, the Yard people were in his eyes "... a body of men on whom he can at all times depend for supporting the Civil Power."²

Though the men employed in the naval arsenal may have shared the view of "the crowd" about the cause of high prices their response was different taking the form of boycotting and co-operative self help. Because the creation of co-operative production societies seems to be allied to the Yard People's activities as trade unionists, this subject has already been considered in the context of our study of unionism.³

To summarise, we are unable to demonstrate that the Dock Yard workers were definitely involved in repeated violent protests over the high price of food in Portsmouth. It is clear that they felt concern about food prices and the marketing system, but their response, shaped by attitudes and traditions peculiar to the Dock Yard, can be seen as an alternative to the ideology of "moral economy". The way in which the views and actions of the Portsmouth authorities and protesters can be contrasted with E.P. Thompson's concept of the "moral economy" is the concern of the next section.⁴

1 N.M.M. POR/F/24 20.11.1801 ; N.M.M. POR/F/24 28.11.1801
 N.M.M. POR/F/24 24.12.1801 ; N.M.M. POR/G/1 26.11.1801
 N.M.M. POR/G/1 21.11.1801

2 See p. 350

3 See p. 386

⁴ E.P. Thompson *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd Past and Present* 50 (1971) pp 76-136

E.P. Thompson's reconstruction of the moral economy can, for the sake of clearer analysis be divided into three parts. First there is the traditional concept of how the market in corn should operate. The upholders of this view belonged to all classes though not all members of any one class may have been traditionalists all of the time. Secondly, resting on the traditionalist view of the market were the paternalistic norms of the authorities. These norms were also supported by other perceptions of, or idealised aspirations concerning the nature of society, the desire for stability and good order, and the belief in reciprocating rights and duties. Thirdly, there was the popular interpretation of the traditional obligations of the authorities as expressed in crowd action during times of food crisis.

The advantage of this reorganisation of the elements in Mr. Thompson's argument is that it enables us to focus more clearly on the interaction between them and their constituent parts. Initially the outline of the moral economy must be filled in by reference to the work of Mr. Thompson and other writers.

Central to the traditional idea of market operations, was the view that local produce should supply local needs, by means of an open market where small purchases could be freely made. Additionally, the price of flour and of bread was supposed to be related to the price of wheat. All of this implied the regulation of the activities of farmers, corndealers, millers and bakers. Indeed, the statutes against forestalling and engrossing, the common law and Assize of Bread were directed towards this end. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries even more specific directions had been given to local authorities on how to supply markets in times of emergency. This body of legislation was the basis of the norms that

legitimised the paternalistic attitudes of the authorities. However, the most important and overriding norm was that good order be maintained. It was this criterion that marked the division between the paternalistic concept and the popular view. Central to the latter was direct action. The action of the crowd is the link between the two parts of the model for it was the threat of riot that motivated the authorities to mobilise the relevant legislation and the resources of the poor law and other local institutions. It was the crowd's aim to make the magistrates take such action.

Manifestly, the crowd sought the punishment of the transgressors of the moral economy. If this was not done officially the crowd threatened to do it themselves. Latently, the aim of the food rioters was to pressurise the administering and trading classes into providing relief or modifying the effects of a free market. The real success of the mob lay not in the punishment of food speculators but in the intimidation of the authorities and dealers into releasing supplies and mobilising charity before a crisis was reached. But as Mr. Thompson remarks:

"However carefully we quantify the available data these cannot show to what level prices would have risen if the threat of riot had not altogether been removed."¹

The aims of the crowd and their folk knowledge of the law determined the form of the riot which moved from market to mills and farms. The targets of the crowd were those who were believed to be holding stocks, those who were believed to be exploiting the shortage by demanding high prices, and dealers moving supplies to other markets. Thompson thinks that bakers were not usually attacked because they were only small businessmen with close links with their customers and closely regulated by law. On the other hand, millers were a particular object of the crowd's dislike.

¹ Ibid.

By the end of the eighteenth century food riots were threatened, or heralded, by written warnings. The actual riot might be initiated by women and a ritualised jeering at the targets. Then, more rioters would collect and the bargaining process began with the punishment of suppliers who refused to give satisfaction. This is undoubtedly too bold a summary of a very elaborate process and it is not meant to imply that every food riot showed all or only these features. As R.B. Rose has written:

"In fact, it seems likely that there were almost as many different types at least of price fixing riots as there were outbreaks of rioting, each involving different aims and different tactics."¹

To what degree does the information that has been collected for Portsmouth support the thesis of a "moral economy"? In this respect the events that have been considered may be subject to a major qualification; they fall within the period 1795 - 1801 which Edward Thompson has distinguished, in relation to food riots, from previous periods.

"We are coming to the end of one tradition and the new tradition has scarcely emerged. In these years the alternative form of economic pressure - pressure on wages - is becoming more vigorous, there is also something more than rhetoric behind the language of sedition..²

Mr. Thompson sees a neurosis among the ruling classes arising from fears of revolution which undermined the social relationships assumed by the paternalistic tradition. In their eyes price setting became sedition and its suppression by force legitimate. Effective repression was now possible because the loyalist reaction to the French Revolutionary Wars created a new weapon in the form of the Volunteer movement. Despite this analysis of the years 1795 to 1801, Mr. Thompson uses many examples from the disturbances of this period including the Portsea riot of 1795. Our

¹ R.B. Rose 18th Century Riots and Public Policy in England International Review of Social History VI (1961) pp 272 - 292.

² E.P. Thompson op.cit.

material, therefore, would seem quite relevant in considering his argument.

Some evidence has already been cited which can be interpreted as showing that traditional views about food marketing and paternalistic attitudes on the part of the authorities existed in Portsmouth. Further evidence can be brought to show that these views persisted and that they were acted upon even when disorder was not imminent. This was the case in 1801 when vigorous action was taken against bakers who gave short weight. Even in 1802, when prices were falling, the constables were enforcing an Act of 1797 against false weights and scales, seizing over two hundred in ten days, which led to fifty two traders being heavily fined.¹ In 1804 when wheat prices had reached so low a point as to cause demands from the agricultural sector for protection, the Portsmouth magistrates even fined the Dock Society baker for short weight. They upheld the conviction against his appeal a year later.² As late as 1815, it was reported that two market people had been prosecuted for forestalling and regrating in poultry.³ The old tradition found a new expression in 1812 when the local newspaper considered the latest rise in prices.

"The recent advances in the price of Grain after an almost universal acknowledgement of a bountiful harvest is accounted for in the following manner, by those best acquainted with the subject in the quarter.

The country was almost exhausted of old wheat, and the stock of every miller and baker being almost expended, their demand in the market required a supply faster than it was possible for the farmer to thresh out his grain; and to which may be added that there is at this moment an imperious call for seed corn, and in some instances, we are sorry to say, millers, who held a stock of corn have taken advantage of the present moment to increase what is generally considered to be their fair profit, by which flour bears a higher proportionate price than that of wheat. The demands for seed corn will soon be supplied and corn must then fall. But it is the duty of the Public to economise as much as possible, and which the present high prices only can effect."⁴

1 Hants. Tel. 4.9.1802
 2 Hants. Tel. 14.7.1805
 3 P.C.R.O. Sl
 4 Hants. Tel. 21.10.1815

The interest of this quotation lies in the way that a reasoned analysis of the market situation is mixed with old suspicions of millers and the traditional demands for restraint in consumption, though the belief that this must be done through the price mechanism strikes a modern note.

The other aspect of paternalism, the use of charity to relieve distress and to reduce tensions, was also displayed in Portsmouth, the lead often being given by the magistrates. These activities follow the pattern met with elsewhere. Subscriptions were raised to establish soup kitchens and to purchase cheap food for distribution to the poor. In one instance an issue of Scotch herring was organised. 1800 saw a charity ball raising eighty guineas, though few came forward to apply for aid from this fund. The officers of a militia regiment gave up using bread in their mess in 1801, a meeting of Portsmouth inhabitants, chaired by Sir John Carter, resolved to refrain from consuming food articles used by the poor and to reduce their consumption of bread. Handbills announcing these resolutions were distributed and a door to door canvas was organised to recruit support. Even a Government Department, the Victualling Office, was stirred by the spirit of the times to give a free issue of coal and potatoes to its labourers.¹

The charity of the affluent classes and the actions of the magistracy in regulating the market should, perhaps, be seen against a general background of philanthropy in a mood of self congratulation the Portsmouth Gazette stated in January 1801:

"The benevolence of the opulent and liberal minded is so general at the present season, that were we to attempt to do justice to all whose hands and hearts have been opened to calls of humanity, a

¹ P.G. 29.12.1799
 P.G. 29.11.1800
 P.T. 5.1.1801
 P.T. 23.12 1797 ; P.T. 15.12.1800

volume, much less a newspaper, would scarcely contain the report of their charitable donations. May their good deeds be recorded in heaven."¹

Paternalism appears to have been practised by Portsmouth ruling groups throughout our period. It is well illustrated by their charity work and the regulation of the market. However, the traditional view of the market, on which paternalism partly rested, did not remain unchallenged. Portsmouth magistrates had only to look to their own town to see the divergence between the moral economy ideal and the reality. For, as has been shown, at least several of Portsmouth's bakers were not the small traders depicted by Mr. Thompson but substantial businessmen with interests in milling. Further evidence on this point would be useful, but even the material available fits into the general picture of the corn marketing and baking industries drawn in secondary sources.²

There was, in the cereal foodstuffs industry, a general tendency towards vertical integration. The supply side of the market mechanism was a complex and sophisticated part of an international system of speculation; so that forestallers, engrossers and regraters were the norm and not the exception among corn dealers. Similar capitalistic practices were not absent from baking. In fact it would appear that prior to the French Wars the large businessman was probably as common in the urban community as the small baker. High prices and profits during the wars led to an influx of producers into the industry which undermined the position of the small baker.

¹ P.G. 12.1.1801

² E.P. Thompson op.cit. p.106
 S.G. Checkland Coin for South Lancashire and Beyond 1780-1806. Business History 2 (1960-61) pp 4-20. C.R. Fay op.cit. J. Burnett The Baking Industry in the 19th Century Business History V (1963) pp 98-108. D. Baker The Marketing of Corn in the First Half of the 18th Century : N.E. Kent Agricultural History Review XVIII (1970) pp 126-150.

By 1815 many had been either driven out of the market, into the debt of millers and corn factors, or into adopting adulteration and labour exploitation as a means of reducing costs and price cutting. One might suppose that this trend was most developed in urban areas and thus damaged the relationship between baker and consumer.

It is possible that price competition, rather than philanthropy inspired the action reported by the Hampshire Telegraph in 1812.

"A Public spirited Shopkeeper at Southsea has, we are informed, for sometime sold this essential article of life (bread) to the public at 2d. per gallon less than the Assize. This has recently provoked an opposition to him by an individual offering it at 1d. per gallon less than he sells it for. Here evidently there must be a loss - who supports it and for what purposes? We are far from meaning, by inuendo or statement, to reflect indiscriminate censure upon Farmers, Cornfactors, Millers or Bakers, but an opinion, and we think justly, prevails that there is an evil in the land as it respects the regulation of the price of bread. Until the Legislature interfere, we, however recommend only a competition in the scale of it, as the most effectual means at present of lowering its price."¹

Here, again, is the traditional view of the market, the suspicion of food dealers and the belief in the efficacy of Government interference. Competition, the panacea already popular in some quarters at the time, is seen merely as a temporary expedient. However the Telegraph's editor did not go unchallenged. The rival paper came to the defence of the bakers, claiming that because of competition the bakers were in fact making a lower profit than the limit set by law. Also, in consequence of other traders lowering their prices, the cut price baker had been forced out of business. Moreover, he had absconded without paying for his flour.² Competition in Portsmouth was made all the fiercer by the existence of the Dock Yard co-operative bakery which normally sold bread below market prices and which in November 1812 further reduced its prices.³

1 Hants. Tel. 18.10.1812
 2 Hants. Co. 25.10.1813
 3 Hants. Tel. 29.11.1813

At least some traders resented the operation of the Yard People's bakery and mill. In 1816, when the Mill Society was dissolved, after the purchase of its site by the Government, there was an active campaign to prevent a new society being formed. The Admiralty was sent a petition which purported to be from Portsmouth's bakers complaining about the Dock Yard Mill.¹ Thorough enquiries were made by the Naval authorities and it was discovered that some of the signatures were not genuine. Further some of the claims were also false. In addition a printed handbill had been circulated "under the pretence of its coming from the People belonging to the Dock Yard". The bill was headed: "Cheap Flour, Bread, Beer, Groceries, Provisions, Clothes etc. etc. etc." It went on to claim that a society was forming to, " ... engross the whole business of the Town to themselves" and threatened "the most summary vengeance will be inflicted on any Person who dare be impudent enough to stand up for his own interest".

This attack upon the Yard People caused a strong reaction on their part when they learned of the petition.

"By some means the names of those who signed coming to the knowledge of the working people of the Yard, about 5 or 600 assembled opposite the House of Mr. Davy, grocer, in Charlotte's row, on Friday evening in a very tumultuous manner, blowing horns and offering some violence by throwing stones and breaking his windows. They were, however, induced to depart at the suggestion of the peace officers. This evening Samuel Spicer Esq., our Chief Magistrate apprehending a further disturbance ordered a posse of constables and ordered them to the neighbourhood of Charlotte's row, but we are happy to state that, not the slightest instance of disturbing the peace occurred, nor was there the smallest assemblage of any description of persons."²

With so large a crowd and the authorities taken by surprise, a very serious riot could have developed on the Friday evening. That it did not do so underlines the orderly nature of the Yard workers. Though obviously angry, the Yard people dispersed when requested.

¹ P.R.O. ADM 3375 March 1816

² Hants. Co. 25.3.1816

Clearly, the marketing system in grain and foodstuffs was changing during this period. This is evident from events and comments made in Portsmouth. However, perceptions of the situation appear to have been mixed and, at times, overlaid by more traditional thought. Therefore, we find a mixture of the "moral economy" with new views. The former, however, appears to have been dominant in determining administrative actions and public comment with regard to the market. Perhaps Portsmouth's magistracy were trying to find a synthesis of old ideas and the new reality so as to create an effective means of controlling the market for social ends without the intervention of the crowd; whose view of these developments we must now consider.

Hostility to bakers was clearly displayed by the Portsmouth crowd at times of high prices. A similar dislike of millers and farmers was expressed in anonymous notices but the only evidence of hostility to speculators in food-stuffs is in the press. It does not seem unreasonable to think that the newspapers articulated a more general and widespread feeling. This inference is supported by the fact that, in order to reduce tension, one editor thought it necessary to explain that sometimes high prices were due to natural causes. All the same it is against bakers and retailers and not millers, farmers and corn dealers that the action of the Portsmouth crowd was directed. This makes for a significant difference between disturbances in Portsmouth and the riots described by Mr. Thompson. Bakers he thinks, were generally immune from crowd action because of their relationship with their customers. The nature of this relationship has already been questioned and Mr. Thompson's description has, in this context at least, been found inadequate. Further, it should be borne in mind that there was a distinction between urban and rural riots in as much that bread rioting in an urban area, surrounded by market gardens, is not likely to take

the form of an attack on farmers. In the cash market situation, existing in towns where bread was purchased ready made, the baker not the miller was the most likely target for food protests. This was especially so if the bakers were also large capitalists with interests in milling and corn dealing.

It must also be remembered that the Yard People were involved in the food market at more than just the level of consumers. Through their society they were also wholesale buyers of corn and bread producers. Paying cash for their purchases the members of the Mill Society did not go to the market place for their supplies of corn but purchased by samples brought to them. The whole attitude of the Yard workmen is far more sophisticated than that of Thompson's crowd. Consider the following extract from a handbill published by the workmen at the time of their boycott of butter and other goods.

"To say that all of us are deprived of these things would be false, from our Wages some of us can procure them: but those who have large families, as well as a Workman out of the Dock Yard can not procure a sufficiency of the Necessaries of Life, it is therefore our Duty to abstain from the use there of, as many impute the present high prices to our ability of purchasing."¹

A shrewd understanding of the laws of supply and demand has been added to the moral economy, and monopolists and regraters do not enter into the picture until the last paragraph of the handbills.

Though many features of similarity can be found between Portsmouth riots and protests and the crowd behaviour described by Mr. Thompson, it would seem that, despite attacks on specific targets and the use of warning notices, the behaviour of the Portsmouth crowd differed more from the moral economy than did the actions of the authorities. To say this, is not to refute the concept of the moral economy; for E.P. Thompson clearly states

¹ Ports. Tel. 1.9.1800

that this period is one of transition, but it is necessary to focus more closely on the nature of this change.

Like the authorities, the crowd in Portsmouth was not abandoning the old ways for new modes of action: they were combining the two. Thus the magistracy did not replace paternalism by Laissez Faire and the crowd did not take to class struggle and wage bargaining instead of enacting the moral economy. In fact the working people of Portsmouth Yard retained their suspicions of the capitalist reorganization of the food market, yet they sought to counter it not with sporadic action but with permanent organization, a co-operative mill and bakery set up in 1796. It is no accident that the seventeen nineties which saw so many bad years should also have witnessed the creation of many mills on a co-operative principle. Further research may show that what has been said of Portsmouth in this respect can be generalised.

This study of food rioting has found the idea of a "moral economy" a useful and fruitful tool of analysis. However, it has to be concluded that in trying to use it to explain events in Portsmouth there is a need for further research into the nature of the market in foodstuffs, as, indeed, Mr. Thompson believes. More critically, a deeper understanding of the way that the attitudes of both the governors and the governed were shaped and changed in specific historical and geographical contexts is required. The aim of such research should be to determine if the "moral economy" and laissez faire were the only ideologies available to the eighteenth century crowd and magistracy in their mutual attempt to deal with and understand the economy of food supply and its social effects.

Economic discontent in the mid-seventeen-nineties became confused with popular politics. We may now ask if the Yard workers stood in the same marginal position to radicalism as they did to food rioting.

The seventeen-nineties saw the flourishing of many popular radical societies. Eventually they were destroyed by official action or driven into an existence so subterranean that it is impossible for the historian to trace them. Before they were extinguished, however, many of these groups achieved some success in terms of size, organisation and propaganda. Further they were to make substantial contributions to the long term development of the labour movement. The national alarm these phenomena created led the ruling classes to respond by using all the legal, and many of the extra legal, devices for repression at their disposal, and by creating others. In some instances the struggle between rulers and radicals reached heroic and tragic proportions. In Portsmouth events were played out in a much lower key. The history of radicalism in Portsmouth is the story of a radical group that failed. By considering the reasons for that failure it is possible to learn much about the relations between the Yard workers, civilian tradesmen, naval seamen, and the town authorities. Some insight is also provided into the political values of these groups.

First, the attempts to establish a radical organisation in Portsmouth are examined. The Spithead mutiny of 1797 is then considered and finally attention is given to events of 1800, the last outbreak of wartime radicalism. Initially, so that Portsmouth's shortcomings can be seen more clearly, some thought must be given to the elements that made for some measure of radical success in other areas.

Radicalism

Secondary works provide the following short list of factors determining radical achievement: the quality of leadership, good organisation, sophisticated ideology, the level of opposition, the state of trade and the timing of agitation.¹ The history of the Portsmouth Constitutional Society, (P.C.C.S.) allows a specific consideration of most of these points.

The exact date of the foundation of Portsmouth's radical society is unknown. Thomas Hardy, the chairman of the London Corresponding Society, made approaches to two clergymen in the Portsmouth area in 1792, when many radicals were beginning to combine. The Reverend Bogue's name had been given to Hardy by a third party. By June 1792 the correspondence was apparently well established; for Hardy wrote: "... I shall be very glad to have an answer from you as soon as possible informing me whether or not the Standard of Liberty is erecting in your neighbourhood..."²

¹ E.P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class op.cit.
 G.A. Williams Artisans and Sans Culottes (1968)
 P.A. Brown The French Revolution in English History (1918)
 G.S. Veitch The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (1913)
 Henry Collins The London Corresponding Society. In J. Saville (ed) Democracy and the Labour Movement (1954).
 Mary Thale (ed) The Autobiography of Francis Place (1972)
 H. Jephson The Platform, its rise and Progress (1892).
 A.V. Mitchell "Radicalism and Repression in the North of England 1791 - 1797". (Manchester Univ. M.A. Thesis 1958)
 W.A.L. Seaman "British Democratic Societies in the age of the French Revolution" (London Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1954).
 J. Walvin "British Radical Societies in the seventeen nineties" (York Univ. Ph.D. Thesis 1970).

² B.M. ADD Mss 27811 Francis Place Coll.

Bogue was a distinguished Dissenting minister and a scholar of some repute. Active in the agitation for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, he also ran an academy at Gosport. Unlike some similar institutions, Bogue's school taught little science or literature, the emphasis of the teaching being on theology.¹ The political disaffection of Dissenters made them a fertile soil for Hardy's radical seed and he was writing to several of their ministers during 1792. However, a letter Hardy wrote to the Reverend Mills of Portsmouth proved less fruitful than his contact with Bogue. His letter ran:

Rev'd Sir

I am directed by the Delegates of the London Corresponding Society to transmit a copy of the Declarations and Resolutions to the Society instituted at Portsmouth for a reform (as we understand it) of Parliamentary representation. Likewise I have to inform you of their wish to enter into Correspondence and be in close connexions with your society. As we are all engaged in our sentiments we ought to be known to each other and act with our heart in a matter of such importance - Our Society began last Janry. and since we published our Declaration and Regulations have increased rapidly in number and respectability

I have the honour to be
Rev'd Sir
Your most Humble Servant
Thos Hardy

p.s. If you have an opportunity be so kind as to give my best respects to the Rev'd Mr Bogue at Gosport you will find him a tried friend of the cause of Freedom. ²

Hardy later noted, on a copy of this letter: "I received an answer disclaiming any knowledge of any society of the Kind and disclaiming having anything to do with it".³

The L.C.S. secretary's efforts to establish a radical organisation in Portsmouth do not appear to have been successful. Even so, some minor

¹ John Angell James The Death of an Eminent Minister (1825) see also British Museum Catalogue under Bogue.

² B.M. ADD. Mss. 27814 Francis Place Coll.

³ B.M. ADD. Mss. 2711 Francis Place Coll.

radical activity did take place and was countered by the formation of a loyalist association. Peace-time Portsmouth did not have the social and economic conditions necessary to support a radical society. The Loyalist Association was concerned mainly with the illicit removal of wall-poster copies of the King's proclamation against seditious literature and loyalist declarations. They also discovered a seller of radical literature.¹ There is no suggestion in the society's correspondence with John Reeves, the London organiser, that any formal body of radicals existed in the area. No further reports of local radicalism appear in the town's newspapers or official documents until June 1795. Then John Carter warned the Home Office that "... some People who meet under the idea of a singing club at which some improper songs are introduced" were complaining about high prices, dropping seditious hints about monarchy and enquiring about gunpowder and the French prisoners held at Porchester castle a few miles away. "The People", said Carter, "chiefly consist of Journeymen shoemakers and taylors who come from London, Bath and Bristol for employment."²

In reply to Carter, the Home Office, alerted him to the fact that,

"there is strong suspicion for believing that they (the radicals) are in intimate connections and correspondence with Societies of similar sentiments in London and elsewhere and the Emissaries have recently been sent from this place to assist them in disseminating of their pernicious tenets by the distribution of the inflammatory handbills."³

In suspecting that a correspondence was being carried on between Portsmouth and London, the Home Office may have been premature and reasoning from their knowledge of the habits of other societies; for the first letter from the P.C.C.S. to the London Corresponding Society is not dated until September 1795.

¹ See below p.575

² P.R.O. H.O. 42/35 25.7.1795

³ P.R.O. H.O. 43/7 27.7.1795

From the letter, appended below, it is clear that the P.C.C.S. was a new body with no formal links with any earlier society, though it may have developed from the singing club detected by Carter.¹ Portsmouth continued the correspondence with London by reporting on the number of members and requesting advice.

Fellow Citizen,

We received yours & read it with great Satisfaction We are much obliged to you for your friendly communication and excellent advice. We deferred immediately returning an answer in order that we might inform you more particularly respecting our Numbers. We have now about Ninety & entertain no doubt of our further increase.

We wish Citizen, to have your opinion on the proclamation & Bill now pending in the Lords' house. Give us your advice. We are wary as it may affect what liberty we now possess.

You may rest assured of our Fidelity & (words illegible) We as a body are determined to abide by your determinations. Give us now your Advice Freely and Plainly.

We would wish to have an answer as soon as possible. We would particularly request this as we conceive the Bill now pending points directly at our meeting. Impressed with this idea we have requested an attendance of all our members on Fryday next.

We remain
Brother Citizens
Yours Sincerly
J. Jackson Beard sec

Thos. Pierce Stewards
N.J. Sheraton 2

The issue that so concerned the Portsmouth radicals, in common with their comrades elsewhere, was the Government's moves against public meetings and societies. In early November the King, after being mobbed on the way to Parliament, had issued a proclamation against seditious and unlawful assemblies. Further, Parliament had been considering two Bills introduced by Pitt and Grenville. Respectively, these were, "... For the more effectively preventing seditious meetings and assemblies" and for "...

¹ The Published Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society
(1795), see Appendices A and B. (Appendices A to F pp. 607-630)

² Ibid.

the safety and preservation of his Majesty's person and Government".

Both bills aroused strong opposition from radicals. The L.C.S. had already written to Portsmouth requesting that they send delegates to a general meeting to consider what course opposition to the Bills should take.

This invitation was probably to the mass demonstration held on the twelfth of November at Copenhagen Fields. A few days previous to the twelfth, the London society reiterated its invitation to Portsmouth adding,

"... our advice to you is that you should remain firm at your post. Be diligent in spreading your principles and consistent in asserting the purity of your principles."¹

In Portsmouth the radicals organised their own public protest and propaganda campaign, though the P.C.C.S. role in this is not clear. The local newspaper gave an unsympathetic report of a meeting organised to consider a petition against the "Two Bills". As, despite promises to the contrary, no important people attended the meeting it was opened by an attorney's clerk from Gosport, who called upon Mr. Howard, an attorney, to take the chair.

"Mr. Howard, having taken the chair then, from a written paper, addressed Those present, and, after reprobating the Convention Bill (which we may judge from appearances nine-tenths of his auditors were entirely ignorant of) sat down with recommending a Petition to the House of Commons against the Bill ...

Mr. Jones a watchmaker then rose, but for what purpose we could not learn. Two others severally harangued from the stage, when a roll of parchment was produced for the signatures of such as were friends to the Petition, about ten o'clock the motley group dispersed."²

The radicals gave a brief account of the meeting in a poster which stated the petition.³ The attendance, they said, was upwards of a thousand mainly poor but honest men who maintained themselves by the labour of their hands and the sweat of their brow. The petition was accepted by all but

¹ Ibid.

² Ports. G. 23.11.1795

³ B.M. 1865 C16 (52) see Appendix C

seven of those present.

It would seem clear that as Howard had his speech and petition prepared, he was probably one of the chief organisers of this meeting. Unfortunately, though Howard was a radical whig the nature of his relation with the P.C.C.S. was not precisely defined. In 1795 Howard published a work in defence of political societies, but he specifically stated that he was not a member of such a society himself.¹ The exact date of this pamphlet is uncertain, but a newspaper reference would suggest November or December.² By the summer of 1796, as a member of a small group in Gosport which corresponded with the L.C.S. and which was in contact with the P.C.C.S. Howard's links with the radicals were more formal.³ If Howard's statement that he was not a society member in 1795 is accepted it would seem that the meeting of the November of that year was not arranged by the corresponding societies but by another coterie of radicals. If this view is correct the reference in the newspaper account to the attempt of Jones the watchmaker to speak, may mean more than a snide comment on a workingman's oratory. Jones was later involved with members of the P.C.C.S. in a political riot and it is possible that his attempt to speak at the petition meeting was stopped by a rival group.⁴ Without knowing who the other speakers were, it is impossible to be certain who was behind the meeting. But it may have been organised by a group, including Howard, who did not, at this time, want to be publically associated with the P.C.C.S.. Alternatively the P.C.C.S. may have been using Howard as a front man, though there was no reason at this stage for the radicals to act surreptitiously.

¹ Daniel Howard A Reply to a Pamphlet entitled Reflections adapted to the Present Time (1795).

² Ports. G. 28.12.1795

³ B.M. ADD. Mss. 27815 Francis Place Coll.

⁴ See below p. 563

Despite opposition throughout the country and in Parliament, the Two Acts came into force in December 1795. The new law against seditious meetings required that the Corresponding Societies reorganise themselves. Most importantly the radicals had to split into groups of less than fifty. Meetings larger than that were illegal unless approved of by the authorities. Even then, all public meetings were subject to considerable powers of interference.

To help the provincial societies reorganise themselves, the L.C.S. sent delegates, John Gale Jones and John Binns, on tour. It was the latter who went to Portsmouth. In March the Portsmouth men were writing to the capital:

"We give you our warmest thanks for your good (Offices) in sending Citizen Binns, as a Deput from you to see us, we are much indebted to him for his information & perfectly well pleased with his conduct which was unanimously voted in both sections of this Society. We sent a delegate to Chichester in consequence of a handbill requesting the inhabitants to associate for the repeal of the two detestable Bills. We had an answer by him which fully authorises us to Assure you that altho in consequence of a Tyrant who resides in that place they can not as here to fore, yet they are persuaded that, nothing short of universal Suffrage and annual Parliaments can ever answer to the end of Good to the people of this much injured country, in our next we will inform you ^{of} our numbers as we are now reorganising our Society in Order to form them agreeable to such regulation as Citizen Binns proposed when with us.

Assuring you of our attachment
we remain on behalf of the Society
Your fellow
Citizens
J. Jackson"

W. Heather
J. Budd jin. ¹

Why Portsmouth was one of the first towns chosen to receive a mission is difficult to say; but it was one of the largest towns near to London. Moreover, the P.C.C.S. had apparently requested that some one be sent from

¹ B.M. ADD. Mss. 27815 Francis Place Coll.

the capital to visit them.¹ Even so, Binns himself was not sure why he was sent to Portsmouth, writing:

"Why it (Portsmouth) was selected as the first place to send a delegate I do not recollect ever to have heard. I went, attended to the duties assigned me, visited the dock yards, naval depots and some of the largest ships afloat and on the stocks naval and mercantile."²

The editor of the Portsmouth Gazette had his own ideas about the reasons behind Binns' visit.

"It is reported on pretty good authority that an incendiary sent here by one of the societies in London, to poison the minds of the brave soldiers & sailors of Admiral Christians fleet. But as a description of his person is in the hands of proper officers, it is hoped he will meet his reward."³

Binns wrote to the editor complaining about the above paragraph. The editor replied:

"What reason J.B. has to think he is the person alluded to, is best known to himself; - and in answer we can only say, that until his letter was received we were not acquainted that such a Deputy had been sent to this Town."⁴

In signing his letter, John Binns had styled himself: "Deputy from the London Corresponding Society to the United Corresponding Society of Portsmouth". In the light of this it must be asked whether there were two societies in Portsmouth or whether the P.C.C.S. had changed its name by substituting the word Constitutional for United. As there is no other evidence of two societies in Portsmouth it is probable that the new name reflects a reorganisation of the established society into divisions in order to comply with the provisions of the two Acts rather than a merging of a number of existing societies. In their letter to the L.C.S., the Portsmouth radicals mention two sections of the Society.

1 J. Walvin op.cit. Privy Council 123 A38 29.1.1796 L.C.S. minute.
 2 John Binns Reflections on the Life of John Binns (1854) pp 64-66.
 3 Ports. G. 8.2.1796
 4 Ports. G. 15.2.1796

As the newspaper denied knowledge of Binns' arrival in town even after warning its readers that an agitator was to be expected there is the possibility that there was another "incendiary" in the locality. However, Binns does not mention this possibility, neither does Gale Jones and both men thought that exaggerated press reports about a radical delegate in Portsmouth referred to Binns.

When two of the town's "principal tradesmen" went with Binns to see the French prisoners of war at Porchester Castle they were stopped by the guard at the gate. Binns and his companions were told that they had to have the Governor's permission to enter, "... in consequence of some delegate from London, who has been sent to Portsmouth to set fire to the dock yards and liberate the prisoners". All the same, Binns visited the French and experienced no difficulty in touring the Dock Yard. According to Binns, however, such liberty was not long extended to him:

"After I had been about a week in Portsmouth, I was surprised by a visit from two members of the Executive Committee of the London Corresponding Society. They informed me they had been sent ^{to} direct my immediate return in consequence of information on which they could depend, that orders had been given to have me impressed and sent on board one of the receiving ships. In consultation, it was thought best that I should fulfil the engagements I had made for that evening and depart for London the next day. This was accordingly done."¹

John Gale Jones, the delegate who had been sent to the Medway towns, gives a rather different version of Binns return to the capital. Jones met an L.C.S. colleague in Rochester:

"I learned from him that the delegate who had been sent to Portsmouth had already experienced the good natured effects of ministerial vigilance and that a defamatory paragraph, announcing his presence had been inserted in the paper of that place, previous even to his arrival! It had not, however, the effect which was intended, for the inhabitants were only the more solicitous to see and hear him! In consequence,

J. Binns op.cit.

however, of the Societies not having obtained any intelligence from him since his First letter to them, they became some-what uneasy, and had therefore deputed the Secretary of the Society to visit him.'¹

Gale Jones wrote his account only a year after the events recorded. Binns, on the other hand, was remembering events nearly sixty years old when he wrote. Unless Binn's mail was being tampered with, and he makes no mention of this, there could be an implied criticism, in Jones' story, of Binns for not maintaining his correspondence with the L.C.S. Binn's more dramatic account of the affair is also suspect on other counts. For a man being sought by the authorities Binns enjoyed a remarkable freedom to enter Government establishments. Also, why did the L.C.S. send a key official such as its secretary on so dangerous a mission, if there were plans afoot to seize Binns? Might not the authorities also arrest the messenger? Was it not more likely that the secretary was sent to Portsmouth with a high level reprimand? This would also explain the tone of Portsmouth's letter to the L.C.S. which is so heavy with fulsome praise of Binns that it could have been a defence of him against unvoiced criticism. In recalling these events it is possible that Binns' recollection was coloured by the developments of the next few months.

After returning to London Binns and Jones were sent on another mission. This time they went together to Birmingham. The continued agitation of the Corresponding societies over the country as a whole alarmed the authorities. In the consequent moves against the radicals Binns and Jones were arrested, which caused a flurry of activity among the radical societies. Francis Place led a campaign to raise a defence fund for the two delegates to which Portsmouth was able to contribute eleven pounds.² In addition,

¹ John Gale Jones Sketch of a Politic Tour through Rochester, Chatham Maidstone, Gravesend etc. (1796) p.35.

² B.M. ADD. Mss. 27815 Francis Place Coll.

the members in Portsmouth reported that they were successfully distributing The Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society. Place was critical of this publishing venture claiming that it diverted resources from more important issues, even consuming £170 of the money that had been raised for Binns and Jones.¹ More important in hampering radical efforts, was interference with their mail, The Portsmouth United Corresponding Society was worried because it had not received any acknowledgement for the money it had sent to the L.C.S. and suspected that its letters were being intercepted. Apparently, they may have been justified to some extent, for a letter from the L.C.S. secreaary, assuring the Portsmouth group that its contribution had been received, never reached them and the P.C.C.S. repeated its complaint several weeks later. However, no authorisation from the Home Office for intercepting any Portsmouth mail has been found.

Daniel Howard's name appears as a signature on a letter from Gosport sending a contribution of £4 11/6 to the L.C.S.² As ten men subscribed this sum there was a per capita contribution of nearly ten shillings, which was considerably larger than the average donation of the Portsmouth contributors. The L.C.S. may have hoped that radicalism in Gosport would be expanded for it requested the name of "a patriotic" bookseller, possibly in connection with its new periodical.

In 1796 the Portsmouth radicals were not only concerned with money raising, writing letters and selling papers. The Hampshire Chronicle reported in July: "Sundry Symptoms of democracy have lately made their appearance...". Portsmouth and Portsea were placarded with copies of a

¹ M. Thale op.cit. p.151
N. Coy "Aspects of English Radicalism" (Cambridge Univ Ph.D. 1971)
Cox suggests that the L.C.S. Magazine was more important than has hitherto been recognised.

² B.M. ADD. Mss. 27815 op.cit.

speech by Fox. Caps of liberty, bearing the words Vive La Republique were stuck up on various coats of arms around the town. "This disorder", the newspaper warned, "is epidemical and is spreading in an alarming manner."¹ A prophecy which threatened to come true, when, in August, the courtmartial sentence on a military man caused a serious disturbance.

Private Joseph Norwood of the Royal Buckingham Militia was sentenced to one thousand lashes for coming to a parade drunk and for striking his officer. In consequence of having a good record and a large family, his sentence was reduced, by Royal mercy, to three hundred lashes. The first two hundred were administered on a Monday morning.

"On this occasion tho from what cause but that of a wish to incite disorder we are at a loss to guess, the rabble thought fit to assemble in large numbers, and during the punishment to express their disapprobation. Pretty Judges truly.

On each of the four succeeding evenings the mob assembled (abetted no doubt by some daemons of discord) during the time the Bucks militia paraded and by hooting and throwing stones etc. were pleased to insult the officers of the regiment alluded to.

This they practised with little interruption till Friday evening when as it now appears, a party was hired for the purpose of tumult; effigies were placed in a cart, and dragged thro the Streets of Portsea by a set of the lowest order, chiefly composed of loose women and children to the great annoyance of the inhabitants. The Magistrates assisted by the peace officers apprehended several in the act of disturbing the peace.

Yesterday William Jones a watchmaker in Queen Street, N.J. Sheridan a journeyman cabinet maker, and John Littlefield, a journeyman shoemaker were also taken into custody, and will take their trials for the said offence at the next assizes for this country - The two former were bailed.

When we reflect the danger ever attendant on rioting we can not refrain from loudly expressing our disapprobation of the proceedings above stated. The misguided rabble should remember that their lives may pay the forfeit of such crimes, into which they have been precipitately hurried.

On those who are abettors of these outrages may the most condign punishment alight.

We cannot dismiss this subject without paying a tribute where justly due - The officers of the Royal Bucks, who have been so frequently and so grossly insulted, have demeaned themselves throughout this business in a most decorous and gentlemanly manner - a conduct that will ever reflect honour on the corps."²

¹ Hants. Co. July 1796, quoted in A Gedder op.cit.

² Ports. G. 8.8.1796.

The "rabble" had been attempting to burn the effigies which were labelled "Bloody Marquis" (which referred to the Regiment's commander, the Marquis of Buckingham), and "Flogging Captain".¹

Though Resident Commissioner Saxton assured the Navy Board that: "I do not discover that any of our People appeared or were concerned in the infamous scene", he feared that serious trouble might still develop. The Yard workers had already made two protests over the Norwood affair, in which the Commissioner reported "... the People of our Yard are involved or have involved themselves". Shortly after the flogging Saxton had had to calm the anger of the Yard work force.

"I have had infinite difficulty in appeasing and keeping them under - But after a very long and warm discussion in the presence of the Builder and his Assistants with the whole Yard surrounding the Commissioner's House - they did at last all return to their duty but not with the satisfaction that I could wish or desire. However I hope and trust it will not break out again immediately but fear of its kindling anew at some future Period, I can not help thinking it will be better to prevent in time, than run the risk of such an Event and I know of no other way to completely effectuate this - but by as speedy a separation of the Parties as may be - Otherwise I fear their rancour is so deeply rooted that I shall be apprehensive of the Breach growing wider every Day."²

The parties that the Commissioner wanted to remove from contact with the Yard men would have been the Bucks militia, who were doing guard duty in the Yard. Saxton's fears were well founded; for immediately before or just after the riot (the date of Saxton's letter does not make it clear), the Lieutenant making a mid-day inspection of the guard had been "insulted, hissed, hooted and stoned". The officer concerned brought a complaint from the Marquis of Buckingham. Saxton was not very sympathetic, saying that the Yard People probably did not realise that the officer was on duty, and that he should have been accompanied by another soldier.³

1 N.M.M. POR/F/22 13.8.1796

2 ibid

3 ibid

The Navy Board was not panicked over events in Portsmouth, hoping that the disturbances would subside. However, being informed by Saxton, "... that the dispute still subsists with increasing aggravation" the Board alerted the Admiralty. Their Lordships were worried.¹

"I have their Lordships Command, "wrote the First Secretary, "to acquaint you that they are extremely concerned that so unpleasant an event should have taken place & that you are to give instructions to Sir Chas. Saxton to discourage any improper proceeding on the part of the people belonging to the Dock Yard and to punish as far as may be in his power any person who may be guilty of any misconduct towards the military."²

The Home Office were as concerned as the Admiralty over civilian intervention in military affairs. The Duke of Portland requested that copies of all informations against the rioters be sent to his office and warned the Portsmouth magistrates that:

"All interference with the conduct and discipline of the Military on the part of the inhabitants where such Military may be stationed is so highly to be depreciated."³

Generally the authorities were particularly sensitive about intercourse between civilians and the military and the possible subverting of soldiers by radicals. Soon they removed soldiers from the billets into purpose-built barracks for the better policing of the country. Portsmouth however, as a garrison town, was one of the few places in the country where extensive barracks already existed, so that social relations between the town and the military were minimised.⁴ It may therefore be significant that Norwood was a private in the regiment performing duties in the Dock Yard, thus ensuring that his affairs came to the attention of the Yard workers. There is no evidence to suggest that the Yard People were involved in the demonstrations outside the Yard. Those arrested for instigating the disorder were civilian journeymen, one of whom, Sheridan the watchmaker, was

¹ P.R.O. ADM/106/ 1867 16.8.1796

² P.R.O. ADM/106/ 2221 16.8.1796

³ P.R.O. H.O. 43/8 17.8.1796

⁴ J.H. Rose William Pitt and the Great War (1914).

steward of the P.C.C.S. Another, Jones, may have been the same man who attempted to speak at the petition meeting of November 1795. The radicals may have been able to utilise the general indignation over the flogging, unrest caused by high food prices, and possible popular dislike of the Marquis of Buckingham, an unpleasant character who headed Oldfield's list of principal political interests in Hampshire.¹ Buckingham's personality may also explain Saxton's unhelpful attitude to the Marquis's complaint. As it was, Buckingham pressed charges against the three arrested men, even though his regiment had been rapidly transferred before the case was heard at the October Quarter Sessions.² There is little reason to think, however, that but for the Marquis's action the three radicals would have escaped trial. The court displayed its attitude towards the accused quite clearly. The local newspaper informed its readers:

"Mr. Burroughs, our Recorder, on this occasion gave a most animated and impressive charge to the Grand Jury, in which he with great ability and perspicuity pointed out the dangers of disorderly riotous meetings and painted in strong glowing colours the many evils ever to be dreaded from the assembling of people in the improper and unlawful manner above alluded to."³

Unfortunately the ultimate fate of the accused is not known. Despite the Recorder's strong words there is little to suggest that the court would have been vindictive. By the time of the trial the affair had been defused, the last hundred lashes of Norwood's sentence had been remitted and he had dropped a civil action against his captain. No action had been taken against any Yard worker. The assaulted officer had, any way, been unable to identify his assailants. Reports of an abundant harvest and the dispersal of the radicals also helped improve the general situation.

Even the suppression of the Portsmouth Radicals shows the restraint exercised by the local magistracy in the use of their powers. The secretary

¹ T.H.B. Oldfield Parliamentary History of Boroughs (1792).

² Hants. Co. 3.9.1796

Hants. Co. 7.10.1796

³ ibid.

of the P.U.C.S. Thomas Jackson Beard, along with a John MacDonald and a Chichester man, William Steel, were arrested for singing seditious songs and refusing to disperse when desired to do so by the peace officers. Beard had to spend a night in "durance vile", but the other two men were bailed.

"On Friday they all appeared in open court, made a public acknowledgment of their error and returned thanks to the Bench for their leniency. This we trust will operate as a useful lesson."¹

In this same sessions Sheridan's companions were dealt with, so that despite the Recorder's strong words they might not have been too severely treated. Sheridan himself was sent to the Assizes and no record has been found of his case.

At the Quarter Sessions the magistrates' attitude may have been conditioned by the fact that they had already taken an effective step towards ending radical meetings in Portsmouth. The late proprietor of the King's Arms, St. George's Square Portsmouth, wrote to the L.C.S. requesting to be informed if they knew of any vacant public houses.

"I have to inform you and the rest of the friends of the Different Divisions that the hand of power have taken from me part of my bread by taken from me my lisanse for suffring the society to meet at my house."² (SIC)

Though the suspension of the licences of publicans sympathetic to the radicals was common enough elsewhere and radicals continued to find places to meet, it appears to have suppressed popular political agitation in Portsmouth. There are no further references to organised radical activity after 1796, though a small group may have continued to meet in a boat off Spithead.³

¹ ibid

² B.M. ADM Mss 27815 Francis Place Coll.

³ P.C.R.O. 32a/ 1/76 . Contributions from Portsmouth for the L.C.S. magazine are recorded for as late as Jan.1797.
N. Cox op.cit. p.115

Following the line of analysis previously indicated the effectiveness of radicalism during the years 1792 to 1796 must now be considered. The first step in this is to ask who led the movement. The list below contains the names of all known radicals with details as to occupation and role in the agitation. Radicals not known to have been active in Portsmouth, even though mentioned in the documentation are not included.

Table 4.1 A List of potential radical leaders in Portsmouth.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
J. Jackson Beard	Dock Yard Carpenter	P.C.C.S. Sec. 1795-6	
J. Budd		" Steward 1796	
W. Heather		" Steward 1796	
Daniel Howard	Solicitor	Meeting Chairman 1795	Active in Gosport
William Jones	Watchmaker	Rioter 1796 Spokesman?	
John Littlefield	Journeyman Shoemaker	Rioter 1796	
John MacDonald		Seditious Signing 1796	
Thomas Pierce		P.C.C.S. Steward 1795	
N.J. Sheridan	Journeyman Cabinet Maker	Rioter 1796	
William Steel		Delegate to Chichester	Of Chichester

This short list is not necessarily a list of leaders. Nor is the relationship between any one individual and the society necessarily the same throughout the period of the society's existence, but it is the best estimate that can be made of the radical leadership and membership.

What evidence there is suggests that the leadership and membership of the P.C.C.S. was mainly journeymen. The occupations listed are roughly similar in status to those shoemakers and tailors noted by Carter. Thus,

it would seem that like other societies, Portsmouth's membership, and a good part of its leadership, were artisan. This conclusion raises two further points: one, what was the role of Daniel Howard; and two, what was the role of the Dock Yard Workers?

The ambiguity of Howard's relations with the P.C.C.S. has already been noted but there can be no doubt of his commitment to the radical cause. In 1791 Howard was acting as political agent for Lord Russell in the bitterly contested county election of that year. Russell was a radical whig supported by the Carter faction in Portsmouth. Howard had moved to a position of active support of the corresponding societies by 1795. In a small publication refuting a loyalist attack on the societies he wrote:

"To suppose the societies composed of a numerous body of men, associated for particular purposes, are not actuated by those sentiments they profess to hold, and are not peaceably and well disposed, because a few individuals (not one of whom, as appears from the examinations of the persons apprehended, were connected with these societies) may have been guilty of excesses, is unreasonable and unjust. Can it be for a moment imagined that so many thousand men are all so artful, so cunning, and so crafty, as to be able to conceal their real sentiments, and avoid a manifestation and detection of them, when the vigilance of government is so great, and when spies and informers are constant attendants at their meetings and posted in every quarter."¹

These sentiments do not take Howard far beyond the radical whigs. Shortly after Howard's pamphlet, Erskine, the town's M.P., was chairing a meeting of the Whig Club calling for the repeal of the Two Acts.² Further, if Howard was the author of Portsmouth's 1795 petition against the Two Bills, its whiggish references to the Bill of Rights and the settlement of 1688, probably reflect his political position. As has been shown, Howard eventually found himself more closely involved with the radicals and his activity continued after the suppression of the local Corresponding

¹ D. Howard op.cit.
² Ports. G. 28.12.1795

society. There is no evidence to suggest that Howard played any part in the Portsmouth society. If his fellow subscribers to Binns and Gale's defence fund have been correctly identified, it may be that the Gosport radicals were a group of professional men, perhaps all as young as Howard, containing at least two solicitors and a surgeon from the naval hospital.

The involvement of middleclass men in provincial radicalism was important in several places. It may be that the lack of such an element in Portsmouth contributed to the radicals' failure. The alternative source of experienced leadership, the Yard workforce, appears to have held aloof.

In the P.C.C.S.'s first recorded letter to the L.C.S., the Portsmouth radicals admitted that because of their town's links with the Government it had a reputation for aristocracy. Their denial that this was so, and their claim that many Government employees were intimidated, implies that the Yard workers were not greatly involved in radicalism. Whether this was due to fear of dismissal from the Yard is an assertion that must be assessed very carefully.

First, there is ample evidence to show that in many matters, industrial and non-industrial, the Yard workers were not prevented by the threat of dismissal from taking action disapproved of by their employers.¹ Most notably, we have seen how the Yard People involved themselves in the affair of the militiaman. Also, there was a situation in Chatham which allows us to argue from a parallel example. Jones was sent to the Medway towns by the L.C.S. He claimed that in Chatham, another Dock Yard town, there were many friends of liberty who were afraid to show themselves. This class of "fair weather patriot" did not include the Yard workers. Jones reported:

¹ See p. 308

"At Chatham, Commissioner Proby, it is said, called together all the workmen (near seventeen hundred in number) of the dock yard, and desired them to sign their names to an address to his Majesty congratulating him on his late happy escape and praying him to pass the Bills. By a singular circumstance, however, the men unanimously declared they would not sign away their liberties, and rushing out of the yard in a body, went to the place where a Petition against the Convention Bills was laid, and every one of them instantly subscribed his name."¹

Thus, Government employment does not appear to be the variable responsible for the lack of political involvement in Portsmouth; it did not deter Chatham Yard People from dramatic radical action. Indeed, evidence can also be found to refute the claim of intimidation in Portsmouth itself. A Yard joiner there, Thomas J. Beard, was secretary to the P.C.C.S. and was also involved in establishing a Dock Yard co-operative. Beard did not leave the Yard until some months after his appearance in court for singing seditious songs, which hardly suggests a policy of victimisation against radicals. If the P.C.C.S. had contained a significant number of Yard workers, it seems likely that, considering their experience in labour disputes and co-operatives, the shipwrights would have emerged among the radical leadership and that their part would have been noted by the authorities. The Yard People were not responsive to radicalism because they were a relatively affluent group and had a strong value system of their own.

The fact that the radical society met in a Portsmouth public house and not in Portsea also supports the suggestion that its membership consisted mainly of civilian artisans. For Portsea was the heart of the Dock Yard workers neighbourhood, while Portsmouth was a more cosmopolitan trading and commercial area where one might expect to find journeymen of a variety of trades. Following from the discussion of membership and leadership must be some consideration of organisation.

¹ J. Gale Jones op.cit. p.81

Assuming, for want of proof to the contrary, that there was but one radical society in Portsmouth so that the P.C.C.S. and P.U.C.S. were the same body under different titles, it is possible to outline the development of the society.

At its first meeting at the end of August, or the beginning of September, 1795, the P.C.C.S. had thirty members. By the end of September the number was more than forty and in the following month nearly doubled to ninety. In March 1795 the society had split into two sections. If those sections met legal requirements so that there were less than fifty in each group, there was a maximum membership of ninety eight. Approximately a hundred people out of a total population of about thirty thousand is not a very significant proportion. However, it is probably not unrepresentative of the smaller provincial societies. Even Manchester and Sheffield only mustered five hundred radicals out of a population of ninety-five thousand, and two thousand out of forty five thousand, respectively.¹

To judge from the letter in which they introduced themselves to the L.C.S., the P.C.C.S. did not have a very elaborate organisation, though there must have been some form of organisation that the society did not bother to mention. Their regulations merely state that a chairman, a secretary and two stewards were to be appointed. The method of selection or how long they were to hold office was not laid down but as we have, in all, the names of four stewards it would seem that there was some rotation of office, as was practised by other societies. Officers were also probably directly accountable to the members, for the society was careful to state that even M.P.s should be liable to recall.

¹ A.V. Mitchell op.cit. p.41

With the passing of the two Acts, organisation may have become more important as the society had to divide and yet remain a co-ordinated body. This division may have been marked by the change of name to the Portsmouth United Corresponding Society. Problems involved in the reorganisation may have led the society to ask for help from the L.C.S.. Binns visit was the response and he may have made further administrative suggestions.

All of this evidence suggests that the Portsmouth radicals were not very capable organisers and they could probably have done with more help from London at an earlier stage. Alternatively, they could have done with a more experienced leadership. A similar conclusion can be obtained by examining the society's ideology.

The problem in assessing the political attitudes of Portsmouth's radicals is that their views have to be more frequently understood by implication than from explicit statements. Added to this, is the problem of trying to establish a radical norm by which to judge what little we can learn. But first, let us consider what the P.C.C.S. had to say about its aims.

In their initial letter to the L.C.S. the Portsmouth men declared their support for the King and constitution, an unexceptional and prudent step. However, their perception of the constitution was likely to win them little official approval. The constitution was to be restored to its "pristine vigour" by a thorough reform of Parliament. The hereditary peerage was to be replaced by what amounted to a meritocracy. A lower house, a "House of Representatives", was to be elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage and deputies so chosen were to be subject to recall. The society also upheld the right of free association and discussion.

Simple and unsophisticated to the extreme, one has the impression that the P.C.C.S. had worked out its views through disorganised discussion rather than through any real study of radical thought. Their demands are within the English radical tradition before Paine, except for their call for universal suffrage. Did the Portsmouth radicals really envisage the vote for all men and women or had they not thought the problem through to the point where they might have had reservations about admitting paupers and females to the political nation? Any way, the L.C.S. found the Portsmouth's society's views quite acceptable. The London body's own cautious constitutional position is shown by their sending a copy of the Duke of Richmond's letter to Colonel Sharman to Portsmouth. This document, dating from 1783, restated the main points of Richmond's reform bill (1780). Richmond proposed: male suffrage, annual parliaments and equal electoral districts. These were the minimum demands of many radicals and used by them to legitimize their agitation even after the Duke had ceased to pursue them.¹ Perhaps the L.C.S. was worried about Portsmouth's apparent lack of political sophistication, hence their advice to the P.C.C.S. to "... attain a minute acquaintance" with Richmond's proposals. There is nothing in the letter from Portsmouth to the L.C.S. that suggests that the P.C.C.S. was familiar with any of the writings of political philosophers. There is no reference to: the general will, the sovereignty of the people, the Bill of Rights, the perfection of the Anglo-Saxon constitution or a national convention. More over there is no evidence to suggest that the writers had ever read anything of Thomas Paine. Just how far the Portsmouth radicals were from the forefront of radical ideology can be shown by a brief consideration of Paine's views.

¹ A.G. Olson The Radical Duke (1961).

Paine shared with other radicals the demands for male suffrage, short parliaments and the abolition of the peerage, but he went further. Denouncing the monarchy and dismissing the English Constitution as a myth he called for a unicameral system of government based on a planned and written constitution.¹

How fair is it to judge the Portsmouth radicals by the standards of Paine? There would have been few men foolhardy enough to have publicly avowed their support for Paine and his views in the mid-seventeen-nineties. Indeed, most radicals were eager to disassociate themselves from his views when they appeared in court during the many political trials of this period. But there is little doubt that Paine's works were widely available in England. In Portsmouth, seven months after the Royal proclamation against seditious literature, which had been directed against Paine, a fine library of his works were available from a bookseller called Spratt. Spratt had in stock:

The Rights of Man

Letter to the Addressers of the Late Proclamation

A letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne

A letter to the Authors of the Republican

A letter to Abbe Sieyes

Thoughts on the Peace and probable Advantages there of

First letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas

Second letter to Mr. Dundas

A letter to the People of France

Letter to Lord Onslow

Whether Paine's works were obtainable in 1795 or 1796 is difficult to determine. Spratt may have fallen foul of the local Loyalist Association

¹ E.P. Thompson op.cit. p.95

who noted his "obstinately seditious conduct."¹

In all, it is probable that most of the Portsmouth men's simple political philosophy was self-generated and inspired by events in France, in so far as they were known and understood. Some measure of the radicals' political confusion can be obtained from the fact that they were placarding the town in favour of a republic at the same time as posting copies of a speech by Fox. None the less, they must not be too harshly judged. Even educated men and practical politicians trying to forge a constitution for France displayed in their debates considerable confusion over the nature of the principles they claimed to uphold, often using slogans and cant phrases instead of defining their terms. Probably many radicals in provincial England found themselves in the same position as those of Portsmouth. One feels that too much emphasis has been put on Paine and other leading writers in the development of the radicalism of the late eighteenth century. Perhaps a study of the more obscure corners of radical activity might reveal the importance of an oral tradition in developing political ideas among the artisans of England.

There was only a limited production and circulation of radical material in Portsmouth. Most of the evidence on this point relates mainly to ephemera or rumour. Spratt was selling radical literature in late 1792 and 1793, Howard published his pamphlet in 1797 and his printer issued the two handbills against the Two Acts and another printer was prosecuted in 1800 for a "licentious parody" on a religious creed. The sale of the L.C.S. magazine is documented but there are only unconfirmed reports of seditious publications during the Spithead mutiny. It may well be that the P.C.C.S. had to act as its own pedagogue and publicist which could

¹ B.M. ADD. Mss. 16926 Reeves Coll. 21.12.1792.

explain its failure to develop a more complex political outlook with a theoretical foundation. The lack of such an ideology probably weakened Portsmouth radicalism.

To recapitulate, Portsmouth was a minor provincial society lacking a solid base of membership among the dominant occupational group in the town, the Yard workers. It also lacked strong connections with any middle class radicals who could have provided political experience, theoretical perspectives and leadership. Inexperienced and unsophisticated, the P.C.C.S. looked to London for direction and advice, which was not given until too late. In this respect Portsmouth suffered from not being near a provincial radical centre which would have been more ready to have made missionary efforts.¹ Similarly, Portsmouth failed to carry its views to other towns until inspired by the visit of John Binns. Without sound organisation or a well developed ideology the P.C.C.S. or P.U.C.S. degenerated into slogan writing. Ultimately it demonstrated its political bankruptcy by the involvement of several of its members in a riot, something that most radicals were careful to avoid. Therefore, Portsmouth radicalism has been found wanting on all counts. Why was this so?

In seeking to explain the history of radical activity in Portsmouth the possibility that there was something about the town and the period that was detrimental to popular political activity must be considered. First, attention can be directed towards active opposition to the radicals by asking if the authorities in Portsmouth, as the rulers of a garrison town, utilised particularly effective means of oppression?

¹ For missionary work in the north of England during the early nineties see A.V. Mitchell op.cit.

As with many places, Portsmouth was caught up in the Loyalist movement of late 1792 and early 1793. The Portsmouth Association for the Protection of Property against Levellers and Republicans grew out of a town meeting held at the request of a group of thirty gentlemen in early December.¹

The nature and effectiveness of the Association movement has been the subject of some debate, from which four different views have emerged.² Two writers claim that the Associations were an effective means of suppressing radicalism. Both A.V. Mitchell and E.C. Black see the loyalist associations as: highly disciplined, closely controlled, largely government-inspired, exclusive committees of gentlemen and officials seeking to support the government with propaganda and actively repressing manifestations of radicalism. Mitchell differs from Black slightly in that he tends to see the success of the Associations as the result of converting and educating (in a manner of speaking), the masses. Black believes that the loyalist movement was what the country wanted. On the other hand, J. Walvin maintains that the Loyalist Associations were merely junta which sought to legitimise the repressive policies of the Government by creating the appearance of public opinion in favour of them. D.E. Ginter provides the subtlest analysis by suggesting that the Loyalist movement was so widespread, and social pressures making for outward conformity so great, that almost any group - or individual - subscribed regardless of their attitude towards the government. The movement was "... capable of

¹ B.M. ADD. Mss. 1626 Reeves Coll. f.122-124.

² A.V. Mitchell op.cit.
 A.V. Mitchell The Associating Movement of 1792-3 The Historical Journal IV 1 (1961) pp 56-77.
 C.E. Black The Association (1963).
 J. Walvin op.cit.
 D.E. Ginter The Loyalist Association Movement Historical Journal IX 2 (1966) pp 179-190.

representing every type of contemporary ideological position short of revolutionary republicanism". In this study of Portsmouth it is possible to respond to Ginter's call for consideration of the Loyalist movement's local variations.

There can be no doubt that the Portsmouth Association was a genuine expression of loyalism in so far as the committee was concerned. Equally clearly it was not spontaneously so. Near the head of the list of gentlemen calling for a meeting to consider the May proclamation against seditious literature, from which the Association grew, is the Collector of Customs, Elias Arnaud. Not far below the top is the name of Moses Greetham, the local agent of the Admiralty's Solicitor,¹ and most of the other signatories had links with the Government (see Appendix D). It is very probable that the meeting was the local response to a circular letter from the Government to certain provincial attorneys, asking them to take action against seditious publications. Arnaud became Chairman of the Loyalist Association and Greetham was made secretary. Many other Government officials filled the ranks of the Committee. Clearly the Portsmouth Loyalist Association fits the general description of the Association movement being officially inspired and run by a few carefully chosen men of undoubted loyalty to the current Administration. Conspicuous by their absence, however, were any representatives of the Corporation. One of Reeves' correspondents, writing to the founder of the movement in London as a visitor to Portsmouth, complained, "I confess it strikes me that if the Corporation are not disaffected they are very lukewarm."²

As radical whigs opposed to the Administration, the Carter faction would not have wished to have been so closely associated with their Tory

¹ B.M. ADD. Mss. 16931 Reeves Coll.

² B.M. ADD. Mss. 19921 " "

opponents and government placemen as to be on a political committee with them.¹ Discretion and loyalty to the Crown led the Corporation to subscribe their names, along with fifteen-hundred other people, to the Association's resolutions.² Even then, they did not do so in a body or with any indication of their official position. In fact, the only indication of anybody's status was an occasional military rank or the title Reverend.

Though these facts bear out the general description of Loyalist Committees they also support Ginter's position, for they demonstrate how men of diverse political opinions came to be listed as loyalists and how those lists could be made to look as if they represented a wider cross section of opinion than they really did. This last point also supports Walvin. Therefore, it cannot be certain that the Portsmouth Loyalist Association represented a public opinion opposed to radicalism and in support of the existing political status quo, though it was led by a small coterie of men who probably were. The question that now raises itself is how effective were the Committee in using the Association to suppress radicalism or mobilising support for the Government.

We have already noted that the list of subscribers to the Association's resolutions provides little help in assessing the measure of public support the loyalists enjoyed. There is no other evidence of the loyalists' public activities. For this period we have to rely on a newspaper published in Winchester, which carried no reports of any public anti-radical demonstrations in Portsmouth, though it did describe a loyalist demonstration which took place just north of Portsmouth in Cosham. The Cosham meeting was presided over by Sir Roger Curtis, a distinguished naval officer whose

¹ See above p.62

² A List of Persons who have subscribed to the resolutions of the Association of the towns of Portsmouth Portsea and Neighbourhood Portsmouth (1796).

country seat was on Portsea Island. Accompanied by illuminations, an effigy of Tom Paine was burnt. Given the political views of Portsmouth's Corporation and their attitude towards civil disturbances, it is probable that they did not allow similar anti-radical demonstrations in Portsmouth. Apart from reporting a seller of seditious literature to Reeves and arranging for loyalist posters to be put up, the Loyalist Association in Portsmouth does not appear to have been very active.¹

In fact, as far as can be discovered, there was no organised body of radicals for the Portsmouth Association to suppress. Only one man was caught removing a "Constitutional handbill" that had been put up "... to spread a spirit of loyalty". It would appear that the Association only lasted for about a month. With the outbreak of war in February 1793, its activities must have appeared irrelevant as Portsmouth rapidly became caught up in mobilisation and experienced an economic boom.

Therefore, it must be concluded that in Portsmouth the Association movement was not a major cause of the failure of radicalism in the town. At most the general excitement caused by loyalism may have ended the activities of men like the Reverend Bogue, whose only known link with radicalism is his correspondence with Hardy in June 1792.

The links between the Association movement, (which in many places was short-lived, if not as transient as in Portsmouth) and the more extensive and longer established volunteer movement have been noted.² In Portsmouth there was a strong overlap in personnel between the leading members of both movements. Elias Arnaud, for instance, emerged as a commanding officer

¹ B.M. ADD. Mss. 16922, 16926 Reeves Coll.

² A.V. Mitchell op.cit. J. Walvin op.cit.
 J.R. Western The Volunteer Force as an Anti Revolutionary Force
 1793-1801. Eng. Hist. Review. LXXXI (1956) p.603-614.
 See above p.69

of the volunteers, and other Association Committee members were volunteer officers. However, the Portsmouth volunteers did not come into existence until late 1796, after the radicals had been dispersed.

While the radical agitation of 1796 may have been one cause of the establishment of the volunteers, the experience of food riots and the threat of invasion were probably more important. In these circumstances the volunteers can be discounted as a force for repressing radicalism, though once established they may have deterred the emergence of another radical nucleus.

The short and unspectacular history of the Portsmouth Loyalist Association and the fairly late development of a volunteer force in the town both suggest that, despite the preponderant influence of the Government, Portsmouth was not a "hive of aristocracy", slavishly bound to the Administration and rabidly anti-radical. But before gauging the real nature of public opinion, the role of the magistracy vis a vis the radicals must be considered.

The Carters' Foxite Whiggism and their handling of the P.C.C.S. must be borne in mind when examining the Portsmouth's magistracy's attitude towards popular radicalism in the town.¹ *We know of few magisterial actions against the radicals.* First, they alerted the Home Office about the emergence of a radical group, and then did nothing until a riot brought the radicals within the scope of the criminal law. Despite being forewarned they did not impede John Binns' work in the town, though, if the newspaper's account can be accepted, the government may have wanted them to do so. It seems plausible to suggest that the Corporation were willing to tolerate the radicals until they posed a threat to public order. Then

¹ See above p. 62

they took actions which had been open to them at any time, like arresting some of the radicals on a minor charge and the suspending of their publican's licence. The three men arrested for instigating the riot over the flogging of the militia-man were not taken until a day after the disturbance which might indicate a deliberate search for the men and evidence against them, showing the determination of the magistrates. Yet it has been demonstrated that there was no vindictiveness in the way the court dealt with the radicals. Similarly, there is no evidence that the magistrates used spies or agents provocateurs against the radicals. In all, the Corporation appear to have been moderate in their handling of radicalism, not using the mob, loyalist gentlemen or the military to suppress popular political activity. Did they, it must now be asked, rely on public opinion to control and limit the radicals, so preventing them ever becoming a successful or threatening force?

Though organised loyalism dissolved rapidly after the winter of 1792-93 the radicals were to experience opposition from some of the men who had been active in the Association movement. Elias Arnaud headed a list of people calling a meeting of the "Real Friends of the Constitution" to pledge their support for the Two Acts of 1795. Once again members of the Corporation were absent from the list and the chair at the meeting was taken by Arnaud. The petition, accepted by this meeting, called the constitution the "Envy & Admiration of the World and the Pride and Glory of Englishmen". Nearly two thousand people subscribed their names and the petition was sent to the staunchly Tory county members and not the town's M.P.s.¹ Perhaps the group of local gentry organising the petition was behind the publication in Portsmouth of a loyalist tract.²

¹ Ports. G. 30.11.1795

² A. Aspinall Politics and the Press 1780-1850 (1949) p.152.

"Reflections adapted to the Present Time" was published in 1795 by a Mr. Alexander Peter and prompted a reply by Daniel Howard. Peter was a member of the Loyalist Association, though not a committee man nor a subscriber to the call for a meeting in support of the Two Acts suggesting that he was not a very important figure. Howard calls him "... the pensioned Mr. Peter of Portsea", raising, if only remotely, the possibility that he was connected with the printing, in Portsmouth, of twenty two thousand copies of a work called, "Strictures on Thomas Paines works and Character" for which the Government paid £152. There is no evidence that this work was circulated locally. Howard attacked Peter's writings, which have disappeared, as

"... a weak and flimsy performance devoid of all reasoning whatever, but yet full of bold, impudent and malevolent assertions and the most inflammatory sentiments".¹

In his turn, Peter said of Howard, "... arrogance in youth is a certain proof of ignorance".² But Howard was acute enough to accuse Peter of trying to mislead people as to the causes of the current distress by blaming the traditional scape goats of the moral economy, farmers and speculators. The young radical writer, resisting Peter's attempt to defuse a potentially political situation, put the blame for high prices on the war. Peter is also a possible author of a long satirical attack on the radicals that appeared in the local press. This was a parody of the proceedings of a radical society, making them out to be pro-French, Republican, illiterate cobblers. The piece was heavy with references to Citizen Last and Citizen Strap. Though the exaggeration of the attack is obvious it is still useful in as much as it points to the occupational group that the loyalist thought

¹ D. Howard op.cit.

² Ports. G. 28.12 1795

the radicals came from; it was clearly not the Yard workers.¹ It is difficult to assess how successful Howard or Peter were as propagandists, or to what degree their different views coincided with those of the town's inhabitants in general and of the Dock Yard workers in particular.

The only clear point of contact between the Yard People and the radicals are the activities of Jackson Beard, the Yard carpenter who acted as chairman or secretary to the P.C.C.S. and secretary to the Dock Mill Committee, and their shared hostility towards the officers of the Buckinghamshire militia. Neither of these points can be regarded as substantial evidence of radicalism among the Yard employees, but there is even less evidence of active loyalism. In fact, for these years there is none.

We have already suggested that the Yard People had their own ideology as an alternative to the "moral economy". It seems possible that this position was also held in political matters and that they refused to respond either to the radicals or the loyalists. It may be that the Dock workers attitudes towards the market in foodstuffs were influenced by Howards attempt to expose the fallacies of the "moral economy". But this is pure speculation. When the Yard men came to set up their Mill society, despite Beard's involvement, they did not use Howard as their solicitor. They did, however, seek the aid of Erskine, one of the town's M.P.s, well known for his radical position.² The inability of the P.C.C.S. to mobilise the Government workers was the key factor in their failure. That failure was also contributed to by the timing of the radical effort and economic conditions in the town.

¹ See Appendix F.

² See above p. 381

In a town where war was as important to wellbeing as a good harvest was elsewhere, the anti-war position adopted by Howard, and many other radicals was probably not a stance that would have appealed to many. Demands for peace, which in the Dock Yard would mean retrenchment, were therefore a liability for the radicals and may have been a major reason why the radicals did not win over the Yard People.

The popular radicalism of the seventeen nineties has been seen, partly at least, as the response of craftsmen and smallmasters to economic conditions which were undermining their independence. It was just this class of artisans we have suggested that did not exist in a significant proportion in Portsmouth.¹ The economic circumstances that affected the town were tied most directly to the course of the war and not to an emergent industrial capitalism. What civilian journeymen there were were probably employed in producing consumer goods for a booming war-time market, though temporary recessions cannot be ruled out. The most important economic condition that affected Portsmouth radicalism was temporary; the acute food shortages, and high prices of 1795-6, with which the P.C.C.S.'s history coincides.

The fortunes of the corresponding societies, generally speaking, had gone through several fluctuations by June 1795 when the P.C.C.S. was emerging. It is significant of the weakness of radicalism in the area that no society had come into existence a year earlier when the arrest of the London radical leaders and their acquittal had caused a widespread upsurge in radical activity which had drawn many moderates, such as Francis Place, into the movement. After this there had been another

¹ See above p.58

downswing in activity lasting until early 1795. The P.C.C.S. was one of the societies that emerged during the following, and last, period of expansion. The Portsmouth group became caught up in the campaign against the Two Acts, the passage of which marked the beginning of a long decline in organised radicalism. Thus it seems that Portsmouth radicalism was closely related to the subsistence crisis of 1795 and that its development came too late for it to shelter and develop within a strong national movement.

Portsmouth did not develop a significant radical society because as a major naval port it did not provide the right social and economic context. As other major ports, such as Liverpool and Newcastle, were also notable for their low level of radicalism, there may have been something about such places which militated against popular political activity.¹

In Portsmouth it has been suggested that the lack of a large group of artisans in civilian employment was the major cause of the town's political quiescence during the early nineties. Further, it is likely that the major artisan group had traditions and attitudes which could be held independently of either radicalism or exaggerated loyalism.

Inflation clearly contributed to what radical activity did take place in Portsmouth. Apart from Howard, the local radicals failed to take full advantage of the discontent this created which points to their generally weak political analysis and leadership. On the other hand, the local authorities followed an astute policy of strong words, moderate action and a careful, but firm, exercise of their powers. The Borough magistrates prevented a crisis from developing and held aloof from the loyalist reaction, which, if it had got out of control, might have polarised the town so making it impossible for the Yard workers to hold a middle position.

¹ A.V. Mitchell op.cit.

Given what is known about the Dock Yard People, in respect of unionism and co-operatives, it is possible that a section of them at least would have sided with the radicals if a crisis situation had arisen. Portsmouth would then have ranked with Norwich and Sheffield as a centre for provincial radicalism.

The Dock Yard authorities were also restrained. No punitive action was taken against Beard, no disciplinary proceedings were taken after the demonstration against the militia officer and no attempt was made, as in Chatham, to force the Yard workers to pledge their loyalty to the crown.¹ In all, no steps were taken by the local authorities which might have forced the Yard workers to take up a definite radical position in order to maintain their independence.

The active radicals in Portsmouth made little impression on the mass of the population. They remained a marginal group without highly developed political insight, ability or commitment, isolated from the main stream of working class society in Portsmouth, which was in fact shaped by the Yard workers.

Discussions of the growth of popular political activity in the seventeen nineties have often tended to imply that the mere existence of a radical society in many places demonstrates that radical views were widespread and general among the lower orders. The example of Portsmouth lends little support to the view that the Corresponding Societies had any great impact on the mass of working people. Before any real assessment of the national importance of Jacobinism can be made many more local studies must be attempted. Their aim must be to test the degree of support which the corresponding societies achieved and their effectiveness in

¹ After the tensions of the seventeen nineties had passed, and peace had made the labour situation easier, the Dock Yard Authorities did discharge two joiners for using seditious expressions.
P.R.O. ADM/ 2631 9.4.1802.

organising themselves and mobilising, or communicating with, a wider group. Perhaps the result of such studies will buttress the notion that the significance of the radicalism of the 'nineties was not its power or its place in a working class culture but that, given the odds against, it existed at all. The odds in Portsmouth were just too great. The abject failure of radicals there is shown by their inability to take any advantage of or play any role in the Spithead Mutiny.

The Spithead Mutiny

A study of Portsmouth during the weeks of the mutiny at Spithead shows that organised radicalism was dead in the town and that radicalism in general was at most a minor influence in the mutiny. It can also be shown that, contrary to the opinion of G. Gill, Portsmouth remained calm throughout the mutiny and further, that relations between the town and the sailors were good.

In fact, Gill's history of the mutiny is contradictory. At one point Gill writes: "Letters from Portsmouth published at the time, (presumably he means letters to London newspapers), show that people on shore were in a state of panic, and were ready to believe the wildest stories about the conduct and intention of the seamen."¹ At a later stage in his work, however, Gill comments on the friendliness of the local inhabitants towards the seamen.² Again, Gill states that the Government could put no reliance on the town's small garrison but later says that the seamen had good reason to avoid Portsmouth because of the preparedness of the military.³

In his account, Gill reflects the confusion over events in Portsmouth apparent in the sources. On one hand there is the dramatic assessment made by the national press and the agents of the central government and, on the other, there are the more measured views of local newspapers and authorities.

The Portsmouth Gazette referred to the mutiny in very mild terms calling it at different times: "The Difference at Spithead", "Discontents at

1. G. Gill The Naval Mutinies of 1797. (Manchester 1913) p. 55

2. *ibid* p. 24

3. *ibid* p. 61

Spithead" "this unpleasant business" and the "unhappy want of obedience". The newspaper complained several times that the affair was being "grossly misrepresented" in the London press and felt that this misreporting was a "wicked perversion" deliberately attempting to heighten tensions among the seamen.¹ The Gazette also carried a letter from the ship's company of the Mars, complaining of false reports in the London papers^{1(a)}. An example of such distortion was a report in the Times of the twelfth of May, which said that a correspondent in Portsmouth was afraid to risk a letter, "From the alarming extravagancies committed by the crews of the men of war here and at St. Helens."²

The actual course of the mutinies ashore seems to have been very orderly. The only trouble came after the seamen had returned to a state of discipline. It was not until the dispute was nearly settled that the Times noted that special military precautions had been taken by the army.

"The gates of the garrison were last night shut and the drawbridge taken up a short time after sun set; field pieces were planted at the Point Gates to flank the landing places at the Sally port and the camber, and to scour Point Street. In short every preparation is made to defend the garrison as if a regular siege was certain.

The troops that can be brought into action in a few hours notice amount to from 9 to 10,000...."³

A few days later the moats were flooded and additional cannon placed on the ramparts with a doubled guard.^{3(a)}

1. Portsmouth Gazette 1.5.1797, 25.4.1797, 16.5.1797.

1(a) P.G. 16.5.1797.

2. Times 12.5.1797.

3. Times 12.5.1797.

3(a) P.G. 16.5.1797.

The precautions taken by the military might therefore be seen as an attempt to strengthen the Admiral's position by intimidating the sailors. Alternatively, the army may have been making safe-guards against the failure of the negotiations. As Howe was afloat conducting the final meeting with the mutineers when the military were securing the town it is also possible that they were merely responding to the potential danger of an influx of sailors celebrating their victory.

In any event such measures were not absolutely necessary and there is no evidence of popular support for them.

The only noteworthy event ashore during the mutinies was the orderly funeral of the men killed during the outbreak on the London. The coffins,

"... were carried in solemn procession from the Hard to Kingston Church Yard, where they were decently interred in the evening. Two colours preceded the first coffin half staff high, and one each of the others, about fifty of their shipmates and nearly as many women in black walked two and two, and each of the coffins was attended by six women in white.

The whole was conducted in the most orderly manner possible and the concourse of people to view the procession pass through Portsea, Halfway house etc. was immense". 1.

This decorous affair was in strong contrast to the sabre rattling of the military authorities.

Shortly after Howe's arrival in Portsmouth another emissary of the central government arrived. As a Hatton Garden magistrate, Aaron Graham may have been less exalted than the Admiral but he was as equally energetic and determined. 2

Being a special agent for the Home Office, Graham was intent upon finding subversive influences behind the mutiny and was irritated because his enthusiasm was not shared by the local magistrates. Equally annoying,

1. Times 12.5.1797

2. PRO.H.O. ADM/1/4172 11.5.1797 (check ref)

for him, was the plethora of rumour. Graham complained of

"...this abominable itch (among all descriptions of persons) for inventing something new and so common is the practice of circulating as matter of fact what is considered only as a story of the day that Treason itself might be planned, executed by the magistrates who seem to think it beneath them to seek for information and even when it is brought to them I am afraid it is very little attended to unless the informers can in the very first instance produced proof sufficient to convict upon - As to the propriety of taking and using it as a ground work to form a plan of prevention upon, they (the magistrates) either do not, or they will not, understand it. The latter I begin to suspect is the case and they very great indifference shewn by the Mayor to two or three things / in my opinion of moment / which I have pointed out to him has induced me to resolve never again / unless indeed I should actually stand in need of his authority / to communicate with him upon any confidential matter whatever."

Indeed when Graham approached Carter and his colleagues with a request,

"... he paid very little attention - indeed I thought he left me in a manner which displayed a great deal of part spirit of which I ought to have suspected him from the beginning though I certainly had hopes of finding the dullest of them capable of distinguishing between this and any other political question and that it would not require much reasoning to convince the most violent of either side that to be even lukewarm in their endeavours to put a stop to this dangerous conspiracy would be in fact to assist in destroying themselves."

Graham was just as harsh about the magistrate in Gosport,

"...on the Gosport side there is now no Magistrate to be found, Mr. Curry being absent either upon business or pleasure." 1

The Government, and some later writers, gave Graham's reports general credence. ² The Duke of Portland, in laying his reports before the King, recommended Graham for his services. However, the London's magistrate's assessment of his Portsmouth Colleagues must not be taken at its face value. ³

Granted, John Carter and his faction were noted radical whigs and Carter did display some sympathy with the seamen. For example, it is doubtful whether the elaborate and dramatic funeral procession of the

1. PRO. H.O. ADM/1/4172 22.5.1797

2. Dugan op at p.

3. Aspnal

London's seamen could have taken place without, the tacit approval, at least, of the local authorities. John Carter may have given more material help by intervening, at the request of the crew of the London, on behalf of a Marine who had attended the funeral against orders.¹ But, it has been demonstrated that the local magistrates would not tolerate subversive activity, about which they were probably much better informed than Graham.² After all, the local magistrates had managed to handle the radical agitation of 1795 and 1796 and Graham had not arrived in the area until the mutiny was nearly over. Graham was also rather hard on Curry, who may have deliberately avoided him but who did not desert his post as one historian has suggested.³ During the mutiny Curry swore in one hundred special constables and arrested at least one man for inciting the seamen.⁴

The evidence of sedition discovered by Graham can be summarised and assessed quite briefly.

Reports of Thelwall's presence in the area, which Graham was sent to investigate, proved, after enquiries which extended as far as the Isle of Wight, groundless. A bookseller accused of harbouring Thelwall claimed that he was being slandered by trade rivals.⁵ Similarly Graham was unable to discover anything of a man in sailor's disguise who, an informer claimed, had been seen giving money to seamen. There may, however, have been some truth in this incident for several weeks after the mutiny a newspaper reported that one William Johnstone, "A pretended seaman", was sent to gaol for sedition.⁶ Besides looking into the sale of ribbons

1. P.C.R.O. Carter Papers

2. see above p.

3. Dugan op cit p.163

4. PRO H.O. 42/42 13.3.1798.

5. P.G. 22.5.1795

6. P.G. 29.5.1797

bearing slogans encouraging the mutineers, Graham also investigated the sale of books or tracts to the seamen. He was frustrated in his attempt to learn more about the incident because Sir John Carter warned the shopseller involved of the accusation against him. Carter also refused to lend the London magistrate the services of a borough constable to spy among the town's public houses. The nature of the publications being circulated among the sailors was not known. One informer who brought information about books being sold on the Ramillies was assaulted only a few weeks later, though the reason is unknown.¹

However, Graham was probably right in suspecting that some ships were being encouraged and informed by means of printed materials. Newspapers and correspondence circulating around the fleet. But he had to admit, "...what astonishes me is that neither the magistrates nor any of the officers of the fleet are able to procure a single copy..."² Nor was Graham able to establish contact with the mutineers.

Of organised local radicalism, the Hatton Garden magistrate found little trace. So poor was his liaison with the local magistrates that he appears to have been unaware of the previous year's agitation. In fact, it would seem that, as has already been concluded, the Portsmouth Corresponding Society had ceased to function. There was an anonymous and unconfirmed report that two L.C.S. delegates had been despatched to Portsmouth and there is evidence that there were L.C.S. members among the crew of the Ramillies.³ It was this vessel that Graham feared was

1. P.G. 5.6.1797

2. PRO, ADM./1/4172. 12.5.1797.

3. Gill op cit pp. 50,53,69,95.

being supplied with seditious literature. Though several workmen were arrested for sedition about this time, it was after the actual mutiny. The men were released after apologising and admitting to being drunk. Altogether, therefore, the evidence of radical involvement in the mutiny is slight. In Gosport, however, the radicals may still have been active. Graham reported:

"The name of Citizen Dean catching my ear one day I was led to make enquiry after him and found he was an Assistant Surgeon at Haslar Hospital ... I was informed ... that Dean is one of the most violent Democrats in this part of the Country and had been discharged from the hospital for disorderly behaviour." 1

Dean may have been associated with Daniel Howard in raising money for Binns' legal defence fund in 1796. A man of that name is down on the list of subscribers from Gosport. Perhaps the radicals managed to survive in Gosport because there was only one county Justice there. However, Curry, the magistrate, was active enough. An agitator was arrested by militiamen and shortly afterwards a journeyman carpenter from Portsea was taken up for damning Mr. Pitt and the war.

Lovelace, the carpenter, was released and then taken back into custody, for which action he took Curry to court for wrongful arrest. Lovelace was encouraged by many "Democratic friends", among whom were a number of young attorneys. Daniel Howard was undoubtedly one of this group and provides the only conclusive proof of any sort of a link between the aftermath of the mutiny and the radicalism of 1795-6. Howard acted as attorney for Lovelace, the counsel being a Mr. Scott. The Portsmouth Gazette reported the case with no sympathy for the carpenter

"A learned Counsel for the Plaintiff, in a most violent maiden declamation after expatiating on the enormity of the offence (Curry's re-arrest of Lovelace) and the tyranny, oppression and injustice

1. PRO, ADM/1/4172, 12.5.1797

inflicted on his poor honest client aided by a number of wonderful Latin quotations from Crotius, Bracton and Coke of Littleton, had the mortification not withstanding such vast trouble and fatigue to receive from the just comment of an enlightened Judge, and the decision of an upright Jury, a verdict for the Defendant." 1

The jury took only five minutes to come to a decision but, if another account is to be trusted, such swift justice was not merely the result of bias against the plaintiff. Curry, the magistrate in Gosport, had, it was claimed, taken Lovelace into custody a second time for his own protection. After being released from his first confinement Lovelace had been hustled and stoned by a crowd. In escaping his attackers by taking a boat towards Portsea, Lovelace in bravado, raised his hand to the crowd. Some sailors, taking Lovelace's gesture as an act of defiance, had manned a boat, rowed after him and brought him back to Gosport. At this point Lovelace was locked up for his own safety. 2 The whole incident demonstrates the lack of popular sympathy for the radicals. It is all the more striking when contrasted with an attack made on the Portsmouth gaol to release seamen arrested for ordinary crimes. The local press added its own censure.

"The just fate which the malicious prosecution has experienced will it is presumed, deter the Champions of Sedition, the Abettors of Anarchy, and the Admirers of Equality, from audaciously standing forward on similar occasions and exposing themselves to the honest censure of every well disposed subject." 3

However, the anarchic egalitarian champions of liberty were not deterred and sought a retrial before the Kings Bench. They were unsuccessful even though Erskine had some obscure involvement. 4

1. P.G. 2.4.1798

2. Hampshire Register. Vol. I p. 90-92 (date)

3. P.G. 2.4.1798

4. P.G. 21.5.1798

The Lovelace incident shows that a few radicals were active, but it does not demonstrate that they were organised or successful in the Fleet. On the contrary, Lovelace's treatment illustrates how dangerous it could be to espouse radical sentiments in and around Portsmouth. Even Adron Graham was aware of the hostility towards the radicals:

"I am persuaded from the conversation I have had with so many of the sailors that if any man on earth had dared openly avow his intention of using them as instruments to distress the country, his life would have paid forfeit. Nothing like want of Loyalty to the King or attachment to the Government can be traced in the business." 1

Apart from the fiasco in Gosport there is no evidence to show that the radicals active in 1795-6 played any part in the Spithead mutiny. However, it could be argued that, considering the size of the Portsmouth conurbation and the constant influx of people, strangers with revolutionary tasks to perform would be able to escape even the most vigilant local authorities. If this was so, it was even more true of Graham, the main source of information about subversive activity in the town. Graham, a stranger himself who made no secret of his business, did not arrive in Portsmouth until only three or four days before the mutiny ended. The ingenuity of Graham's argument that a plethora of false rumours could serve as a cover for real plots must be recognised; but, like the thesis that the agitators worked with such efficient secrecy as to avoid detection, it is by its nature unprovable. We can only remark that such effectiveness was not associated with local radicals nor with many other conspirators of the time.

If there was no link between Portsmouth radicals and the mutineers was there any between others in the town and the seamen? In particular were the Yard workers involved?

1. PRO, ADM/1 4172. 22.5.1797.

In reading through the Yard records we find virtually no mention of the mutiny. Commissioner Saxton, however, as a senior naval officer must have been fully informed of events and he was sent copies of "An Act for the better Prevention and Punishment of Attempts to seduce Persons serving in His Majesty's Forces by Sea or Land or to incite Mutiny or disobedience", and "An Act for more effectually restraining Intercourse with the crews of certain of His Majesty's Ships in a state of Mutiny and Rebellion".¹ The information in these Acts was for the edification of the Yard workers. Saxton reported that the Acts were,

"... read this day at noon at the leads of the Call Office to a body of full four thousand men consisting of the Officers of every class - the Artificers Labourers and Workmen of every denomination in the Yard - And I could not but be much satisfied with the seeming earnest testimony of attention and respect as marked by their voluntary and repeated unanimous expression of approval in the usual way."²

This apparent support for the Government in early June can be explained by the fact that these two items of legislation were aimed, not at the Spithead mutineers who had returned to discipline in mid-May, but at the "Floating Republic" in the Medway. As this second mutiny was the more overtly political of the two, the Dock Yard workers' cheers, which so pleased the Commissioner, must be regarded as further evidence of their lack of political radicalism. Yet in the eyes of contemporaries there was some reason to be concerned about the attitude of the Yard workers. In the middle of the mutiny, the artificers of the Dock Yard forcibly expelled a Quartermaster who had struck a shipwright and the Commissioner had noted the parallel with events afloat.³ Similarly on the twenty second of May

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1. Saxton could have obtained information from Admirals Spencer and Gardner whom he entertained. NMM POR/H/14 8.6.1794.
 2. NMM POR/H/14 9.6.1797.
 3. see above p. 336

Graham reported to the Home Office:

"Things here I think wear rather an inauspicious appearance, and unfortunately the Police of this Place is in so weak a state that government can hope but for a very little assistance from it. There is to be a meeting of shipwrights to consider of an application for an addition to they pay in time of Peace. I wish that may be the only object of their meeting, but as they are to appoint Delegates, there is no knowing what they may take it into their heads to ask for." 1

Graham's fears were groundless. In the first place, the meeting was cancelled and, in the second, the Yard people were not copying the forms of business adopted by the mutineers but rather using their own tried and tested means of dealing with their employers.² Once more Graham's inadequacy as a witness to the mutiny is shown. Being a stranger he lacked the local knowledge to put events in the town into a proper perspective.

Despite previous demonstrations on behalf of soldiers and sailors and the fact that they had friends and relatives afloat, the Yard People did not take any active part in the mutiny. Like most of the other townsfolk they had only a general sympathy with the seamen and offered no real aid or counsel. Some further light is thrown on the relations between the town and the fleet by a serious disturbance which took place sometime after the main events.

About two weeks after the mutiny a riot was precipitated by the seamen who were aided by some of the townsfolk. The trouble began with an ordinary brawl between sailors of two ships. Several sailors were arrested. Unable to obtain enough evidence to commit them immediately to the County prison, Carter ordered that the men be held in the Borough gaol. During the night after the fight, a woman was molested by some seamen who were detained along with the other arrested men. About eleven

1. PRO ADM/4127 22.5.1797.

2. see Chap. III

or twelve o'clock the next day forty or fifty seamen tried to release the imprisoned sailors, threatening to break into the gaol. The situation became as serious as any which occurred during this period when civilians joined the seamen to form a mob. Carter then called on the military for assistance. This action persuaded the seamen to retire, after which the rest of the crowd also dispersed. No mention is made of any reluctance on the part of the military to act. When all was quiet and because of the lack of evidence, the Mayor released the men who were being held for fighting. The other sailors were sent to the County gaol with two other seamen who had been arrested for robbery.¹ The situation remained tense but the authorities were not intimidated. The gates were shut, additional guards posted and the moats flooded. Large numbers of seamen, however, remained on the streets. In response to a request from "the inhabitants" of Portsmouth, the Mayor called a public meeting where every householder in the town was sworn to act as constable. An evening curfew was enforced by a patrol. Clearly the magistrates and townsfolk, acting vigorously to maintain order, were not intimidated by the seamen, and no further trouble occurred.

This riot came to the attention of the Duke of Portland through the offices of an unnamed correspondent. Thus, besides demonstrating local attitudes, the disturbance throws some light on the relations between the Corporation of Portsmouth and the central government. In a sharp letter to John Carter, the Duke of Portland said that the Mayor should take all steps necessary to prevent riot. In fact, the steps he advised had already been taken.² A few days later the Duke returned to his point about the sailors' demonstration: "... a proceeding so outrageous

1. PRO, HO 43/9. 26.5.1797.

2. PRO, HO 43/9. 26.5.1797.

in contempt of the Civil Authorities in such a place as Portsmouth and in such a moment as the present is of the worst example." ¹ This attitude may have been occasioned by several factors. First, the Corporation had not been forward in the loyalist movement of the early nineties. Second, Aaron Graham had reported unfavourably on the magistrates; and third, the Government was probably still worried that mutiny might erupt at Spithead for a third time, while the situation at the Nore was deteriorating.

As has been shown, the Carters were willing and competent to take steps to secure the peace and security of the town. Though they displayed sympathy towards the mutineers there can be no question as to the loyalty of Portsmouth Corporation. If the local press is anything to judge by, most of the townspeople shared the Corporation's attitude; to what degree particular sectors of the community subscribed to it is difficult to say.

Many of Portsmouth's inhabitants probably had personal links with the mutineers. The father of one of the seamen's leaders was said to be an invalid in Portsmouth garrison. Many other locals, tradesmen, publicans and whores, were likely to have had a vested interest in the seamen's unusual freedom to spend money. Also, an element of intimidation may have entered into the relations between the sailors and the town, for the seamen commanded the most powerful weapons of their day, a fleet of warships. An awareness of the political and social dangers of the situation was likely to have been greatest among the town's upper echelons; but there is no proof that anyone in the town, apart from the military command, viewed the mutiny with active fear and hostility. On the other hand it cannot be shown that there was anything more than a diffuse sympathy for the seamen and no evidence exists to show that there was organised or overtly political support for the mutiny.

1. PRO, HO 43/9. 29.5.1797.

If incipient popular radicalism was to be found in Portsmouth it is reasonable to think that it would have found expression at a time of political and social crisis such as 1797 when social rebellion could easily have turned into revolution. In fact, the events of April and May 1797 appear to have been carried on in local conditions that were almost a-political, so small was the advance made by radicalism in the area. The issues of the mutiny were not generalised. Though given a certain degree of support by the townsfolk of Portsmouth the seamen remained a distinct group whose dispute with the Government did not involve anybody else. Essentially the mutiny was a labour dispute and Portsmouth inhabitants, familiar with servicemen and other Government employees, may well have seen it in that way. The Yard workers had a long history of confronting their employers, who were also the Government, so that many of the features of the mutiny may have been familiar to local people and not a cause for undue excitement. However, there was never any question of a coalescence of Yard men and sailors. Neither sought to contact the other. Both groups were conscious only of their own situation and sought to achieve only their own sectional aims. A final demonstration of the isolation of any radicals in Portsmouth from the mass of the population is provided by events in 1800.

1800 was a year disturbed by protests arising from food shortages. It was also a year marked by the rhetoric of political protest, which as has been noted coloured some of the posters concerned with the food crisis.¹ Indeed, it is not entirely clear that the small radical agitation of 1800 can be separated from the other troubles of that year, they are dealt with separately mainly because the Mayor distinguished the incidents and appears to have been more worried about relatively minor affairs than about the threat of food riots. In fact, besides underlining the political rhetoric current in 1800, the events of that year illustrate how trivial the radical effort in Portsmouth had become.

In the midst of the food crisis, Mayor Goldson received what he considered to be an abusive letter together with a printed epigram.

Dr. Goldson,

Knowing Your Principles to be truly Democratic, I have sent you the enclosed Epigram requesting you will send a copy of it to all our Friends in the same persuasion. You have now a cloak to cover your sentiments, which will avoid all Suspicion, our Friends here are all in high spirits I shall be with you in a few days will give you a call let me here from you if possible before I leave their and if anything material should occur to prevent my intended journey you shall hear again from Your Humble Sr.

Jas.Francis
London Corresponding Society
Goodge St. 26.7.1800. 2

Goldson saw two possible motives behind the sending of this material. Probably with the corresponding society of 1795 and 1796 in mind, he thought that the letter might have been a veiled threat against himself:

1. see above p.524

2. PRO HO 42/50 27.7.1800

The epigram enclosed was printed on a small card published by Thos

Clio Rickman of Upper Marylebone Street:

Young Saul (in Holy Writs they say)
To seek his Father's Asses went Away
Should Junior George on such a Job go out
He'd seek his Father's Ministers, no doubt.

Clio.

"... to deter me from the line of conduct I have and shall resolutely pursue as chief magistrate of this town, the police of which from its mixed population requires no small exertion to keep it at the time quiet but which I have been enabled to do by the most cordial assistance of my colleagues ..."

The possibility that the letter was a practical joke does not appear to have occurred to Goldson. He asked the Postmaster to intercept any letters from London radicals to Portsmouth. Told that he needed the Secretary of State's permission to do this, Goldson wrote to the Duke of Portland. The latter replied promptly but regarded the affair more lightly than the Mayor did.

"Who so ever may be the author of the letter you received his Grace can not but view it as the effect of malevolence and as an additional proof of active and faithful exercise of the duties which belong to your station." ¹

Goldson may have been inclined to have taken the letter at its face value because he had recently prosecuted a printer for publishing and circulating a parody on a religious creed. He had also dealt with a man and a woman for passing a mock bank-note on which were printed seditious sentiments. Further several people had been arrested for using seditious expressions. ² Goldson was also aware that the anonymous

1. PRO HO 43/12 29.7.1800.

2. The parody may have been more indecent than seditious. The Gazette reported that William Thompson, a Portsea printer, had been committed for publishing a "licentious" pamphlet called The Matrimonial Creed, "tending to expose the Creed of St. Athanasuis to contempt and ridicule". P.G. 17.7.1800.

In the top left hand corner of the mock banknote there was a picture of John Bull bent double under a pack labelled "Salt Tax", "Triple Assessment". John Bull was climbing up "Constitution Hill" and mouthing "Long Live the King". The bill bore the words:

"Promise to pay Sir Timothy Takeall or bearer the sum of Two Pence on the abolition of Slavery and the Establishment of Freedom"

"England the 1st day of April 1798 For Stephen Grumble and Bearall Jeffry Growler".

posters that were going up in the town protesting against high food prices, made threats against aristocrats and local dignitaries. These incidents probably coloured Goldson's reaction, but he misjudged the situation.

None of the posters sparked off any trouble. They had very strong stylistic similarities and several were said to be in the same handwriting. All appear to have been 'one-off' copies; so that there is good reason for thinking that the agitation of 1800 was the work of a very small group of people whose opinions were not representative of the bulk of the populace, and most certainly not of the Yard workers. For all the froth of political agitation, the town remained calm. As in 1795 and 1796 the radicals failed to mobilise unrest over high food prices for political purposes. Equally, in 1800, one doubts the seriousness of their effort.

Appendices A and B

Extract from the Published Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society (1795) pp 75-78

September 29th, 1795

Brother Citizens

The Portsmouth Constitutional and Corresponding Society hasten to open a communication with you, and also to solicit such information as may be deemed useful and necessary to an institution yet in a state of infancy. We have assembled for several weeks, without any particular order, until a fortnight back, when we began regularly to enter members, and have met with great success having admitted upwards of thirty at our first meeting; the sentiments of nearly all the DISINTERESTED in Portsmouth being in OUR FAVOUR, we are sanguine in our expectations, of rapidly increasing our numbers.

From the situation of this place, it is probable you have considered it as one of the hives of Aristocracy; but the reverse is exactly the case; the aristocracy being chiefly, if not wholly composed of those who hold places under the government; the complexion of the great body of inhabitants is purely Democratical, though many who are good citizens are prevented from ~~av~~owing their principles publicly, by the certainty of being discharged from their relative functions in the Dock-Yard for so doing.

Our newly formed Society is chiefly composed of workingmen whose intentions in meeting together are from a firm persuasion of the necessity there is in the present alarming crisis, for consolidating, in a regular manner, all the well wishers of their country, as the only means of saving

her from impending destruction. Should there be anything improper in this address, we request your friendly correction; and if you esteem us worthy of your regard you may depend on our steady adherence in preserving in that sacred cause for which you have so long and so gloriously struggled, and for which the Portsmouth Society has united. The London Corresponding Society we behold with the filial respect of children to their parent. Accept us then as your offspring give us your advice and that in an open and friendly manner, as a father to his sons, and we shall not be unmindful of the same. Our hearts are with all the family, and we fondly wish to be UNITED WITH THEM, not only in distant views, but in real personal union. It is our studied intention to particularly guard against any degree of harshness, either in manner or expression; and we hope our freedom will be excused for as FREEMEN WE ARE PLAIN. The case of Truth, needs little embellishment; and truth and justice, with every other claim due to deeply afflicted humanity, are on our side: with such auxiliaries the voice of Reason is sure to prevail over all the delusive attempts an artful manouvres of Aristocratic Sophistry.

Our Society has submitted for your inspection a copy of their Declarations and Regulations; if there should be aught contained in them that is unsuitable or improper, we request your revision of the same

DECLARATION AND REGULATION OF THE

PORTSMOUTH CONSTITUTIONAL AND CORRESPONDING SOCIETY

The members of the aforesaid Society declare, That they associate together for the express purpose of communicating their sentiments on what they esteem National Grievances and their conceptions of such do not in the least Militate against the KINGLY OFFICE of family of the present sovereign. They also equally disclaim any unfavourable ideas against the form of the CONSTITUTION and as such symptoms should be manifested in their neighbourhood they will come forward in support of the CIVIL LEGAL

AUTHORITY.

By the Constitution, they understand a pure form of three estates no further connected together ~~then~~ to give efficacy to their proceedings; and they conceive these three estates to consist of a supreme executive or chief magistracy, which according to their opinion, constitutes the KINGLY OFFICE, or first Estate. Secondly, An assembly of NOBLES, that is to say those who have rendered eminent services to their country, or are distinguished for their wisdom and virtues, where by they have been promoted to a share in the legislation of the same for the purpose of advising on all weighty matters concerning the public weal, as well as forming a check on those hasty resolutions naturally attendant on popular assemblies and which at all times it is totally impossible to guard against, especially when the public mind is inflated with passion, or biassed by any particular event; and also to give that necessary gravity and careful revision so justly requisite in determining on public affairs.

Thirdly, A House of Representatives, delegated by the free and uninterrupted choice of the whole nation for a short term, and responsible for their proceedings to their constituents who are all persons of adult years, in possession of their reason and nor incapacitated by crimes. The aforesaid deputies so chosen are subject to be recalled by the respective constituents, on acting contrary to their wishes, or forfeiting their confidence.

Such the Portsmouth Society believes the constitution of Britain to have been, when first framed, and, as such, they are zealously attached to the constitution of Kings Lords and Commons. The intention of their meeting is to restore the BEAUTIFUL FABRIC to its pristine vigour by which the happiness of the country can only be advanced, and the scandalous abuses under which it labours eradicated.

By the spirit of the constitution every Citizen possesses a right to meet in a peaceable and orderly manner.

First, For the purpose of conveying information to each other, and next for the purpose of stating their complaints to Parliament when aggrieved; and also to collect the sentiments of the whole nation which cannot be done but by men associating and corresponding together. These are the sentiments of the Society; and as they are assembled with the full purpose of observing the strictest order among themselves, so they are determined not to be insulted by others, and therefore, to preserve peace and order in their Society they have agreed to the following regulations.

First. That this Society meet every week by, on a Monday and take the name of the Portsmouth Constitutional and Corresponding Society.

Secondly. Every person wishing to become a member, must be proposed and seconded by two members at least, who shall on no account propose any person unless they can vouch for the credibility of his character, and also are convinced his application proceeds from the knowledge of our principles, and the conviction of the necessity there is for preserving order, humanity and firmness, which are the grand pillars of our union.

Thirdly. The names, occupation and residences of all members are to be kept in a book provided for that purpose, and each member to pay thirteen pence per quarter, to be applied in discharging all expenses that may be incurred in the pursuit of our grand object, an account of which shall be delivered into the Society every month.

Fourthly. In order to preserve a right understanding with any other Society that may be induced to form in our neighbourhood, professing the same principles as ourselves; a member shall be deputed in our name to agree in the promotion of such measures as be deemed necessary, our Society first approving and consenting to the same.

Fifthly. No member shall be permitted to enter the Society room in a state of inebriety, and each member to be particularly careful to avoid personality and harshness of expression to each other in the course of debate.

Sixthly. A Chairman shall be appointed to preside at our meetings, who shall be in every respect, by each member, the conservator of order and decorum during the continuance of the sitting.

Seventhly. Two Stewards and a Secretary shall be appointed to have charge of the books, cash, etc. appertaining to the Society.

These Citizens are our Regulations, which we request you to revise and correct in what you deem necessary; and we beg you particularly to consider our assertion of rigidly persevering in the case, and coming forward in support of the civil legal authority if occasion requires. We had the pleasure to enter Ten New Members last night of meeting.

Having nothing more to communicate at present, we wait for your speedy answer, and subscribe ourselves your Fellow Citizens.

IN CIVIC AFFECTION

_____ Stewards
 _____ Secretary

Appendix B

Answer to the same

October 'th, 1795

Fellow Citizens,

The London Corresponding Society congratulate you on the motives and spirit of your Association, manifested by your communication of the 29th ult. Your expression of confidence and esteem we received with sincere satisfaction for nothing could be more grateful to our feelings, than the honest approbation of Fellow Citizens voluntarily embarking with us to promote the Prosperity and Freedom of our country, and the happiness of prosperity.

You will discern the Regulations of our Society, of which we send you twelve copies, how intimately our principles and rules of conduct coincide with your own; it has been our uniform sentiments, that the good sense of this country, actively applied, is competent to retrieve it from all the grievances and disgraces into which it has been drawn and insidiously plunged by great bad men. In the ordinary regulations of particular Societies connected with us as you are now are, we have therefore deemed it especially incumbent on your own efforts in preference to a partial or implicit reliance on others, or even ourselves: we know the virtues of the land, and that it is not upon the labour or zeal of a particular body, however great or many, that the future safety glory and happiness of this country depends. We therefore, on this as we shall on all other occasions recommend to you to think **boldly**, decide calmly and act prudently; but be firm.

The tenor of your letter strengthens the discreet regulation of your conduct and proceedings; if on the perusal of our forms you perceive any particular deserving your adoption your own judgements will not mislead

you: Trust to them.

We likewise send you six copies of the DUKE OF RICHMONDS LETTER TO COLONEL SHARMAN; and the state of Parliamentary Representation; they contain nearly all that is essential to a knowledge of the cause and means of correcting national grievances; no friend to Reform should be ignorant of any particular of these, and we doubt not that you will think yourselves individually obliged to attain a minute acquaintance therewith, and so advise those of your friends who may be informed as to matters in which everyman who breathes British air has an interest.

You will see the propriety of furnishing us with periodical returns of your numbers, and such information of other Societies that may be induced to form either by branching from yours, or after your example, in your town and neighbourhood, on our parts we shall not be unmindful. Remember that REFORM is the cardinal point of our pursuit - be steady and watchful, the tract is difficult but distinct; Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments are our only means of hope, for without, our future Peace and Freedom, with the Liberty and happiness of our posterity, must be blotted out for ever!

The poisonous channels of corruption the treacherous mists of Aristocracy and Superstitious delusion; are the sole obstructions in the road to national prosperity; but they will sink and fade away before men united by reason virtue and liberty. Act then with intrepid integrity, be communicative but cautious, be temperate in argument, for truth omnipotent ~~over~~ error is weakened by violence; love peace, persevere, avoid the bane of religious controversy, bear every respect for the laws that is due to them, by such conduct, we must infallibly succeed in rescuing the much deluded and aggrieved NATION from her present misery, and soon have the glorious consolation of restoring her once more to the enviable distinction

of the most free nation on earth.

We conclude in the name and

by the order of

The London Corresponding Society

John Ashley (Secretary)

Alex Galloway (Assistant Sec.)

Appendix C.

A poster calling a meeting in Protest against the Two Acts.

At a Meeting of the Independant inhabitants
OF PORTSMOUTH, PORTSEA and the vicinity
CONVENED PURSUANT TO A PUBLIC NOTICE OF
NOVEMBER 20, 1795

At the Beneficial Society-Hall, Portsea
consisting of upwards of One-Thousand Persons,
it was resolved, That a Petition should be presented
expressive of their decided disapprobation of the

CONVENTION BILLS

Now pending in Parliament, and praying for their Rejection and the
following PETITION being produced and read, it was agreed to, by the
Meeting (with only SEVEN DISSENTING VOICES) and ordered to lay open at
the Beneficial Society Hall for the signature of such other Persons as may
be desirous to sign it, till Monday Afternoon next, and be immediately
printed and distributed.

To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament Assembled

THE HUMBLE PETITION

of the inhabitants of the Towns of Portsmouth and Portsea.

SHEWETH

THAT YOUR PETITIONERS, AS BRITONS, VALUE LIBERTY AS ONE OF THE FIRST OF
BLESSINGS

They account it their birthright to speak their minds freely on all
public matters, and can not hear but with indignation of being thereby
exposed to Fine, Imprisonment or Transportation. They are confident that

it belongs to them to hold PUBLIC MEETINGS at their pleasure; without being subjected to the Inquisitorial Presence of a Magistrate, or the Danger of Arrest for Freedom of Speech or feeling the horrors of military execution at refusing to depart from his command.

The general principle of freedom which they there imbine, the knowledge of their rights as men and Britains, and information as to their duties as Members of the Social Body, all combine to attack them more strongly to the Constitution, to qualify them to act their part with greater propriety, as useful citizens and as loyal subjects.

They consider it as their ancient and unquestionable privilege, that THE PRESS SHOULD BE FREE; and that men, who by the frank discussion of the measures of Government, overawe the conduct of Ministers, and contribute to the pure administration of justice should not be exposed to the wanton attack of the Attorney General; who by a teasing prosecution may deprive him of his Liberty, and rob him of his fortune. These rights we claim, demand and insist upon as essential to the continuance of the compact between the King and the People, as it is summed up in the Bill of Rights.

'Tho many of us be poor, we are honest and industrious, and by the labour of our hands and the sweat of our brow, do not only maintain ourselves, but nourish and support in affluence those very men who would trample upon us, and annihilate our consequence in society. Your Petitioners beg leave to remind this honourable House, that though often of late reproached for their poverty as persons who have no concern with the Transactions of Government they consider themselves the great Basis of Society, who by their strength and exertions, support all superior ranks, many of whom seem to have forgotten whence their consequence has arisen, and that were they to withhold their support, the elated men must sink to a level with themselves.

Your Petitioners would press it upon the attention of the honourable House, that the aim of good Government is to protect the poor against the rich; where as the design of these Bills appears to be to arm the rich against the defenceless poor. The poor are the first to feel the weight of oppression, consequently the first to complain by reason of their weakness. They are filled with inexpressible horror that Laws should be framed to stifle the groans of their misery, and compel them in silent anguish to pine under the bitterness of distress.

That those of your Petitioners who are persons of property consider their poorer brethren as men equal in rights, and as having an equal stake in Society; because on the purity of the Constitution, and the rectitude and mildness of the Government their Happiness, which is their ALL, depends.

While your Petitioners view with the most marked detestation the insult offered to the person of His Majesty (as already signified by their Address from this Town) they can not, without the most poignant grief, behold an arbitrary Accumulation of Treasons calculated only to harass the subject without making the smallest addition to the Security of his Majesty's person, whose greatest safety, and whose only impenetrable Shield, consists of the Affection of his subjects.

Your Petitioners likewise consider themselves as grievously injured by the studied Ambiguity in describing a Misdemeanour; which, by the craft and mallice of insidious Spies might expose the most upright and innocent man and most ardent lover of the Constitution of his country, to a barbarous punishment; not hereto fore dictated by the mild and benignant Spirit of English Laws. Against the wrongs here enumerated, we loudly declaim and can not refrain from saying, that while knowledge, civilisation and philanthropy increase...to lessen the comforts of

Society...to arrest the mildness of Government...and enact laws of harshness and severity...is equally impolitic and unjust.

Your Petitioners therefore, as enemies of violence and tumult, and well wishers to the happiness of their country, cannot conceal from you the anxiety and concern they entertain on a review of the consequences which appear inevitably to attend the passing of the Convention Bills; and most earnestly beseech this honourable House to reject these Bills as prejudicial to the Interest and Welfare of the country, and as a Violation of the Bill of Rights...as destructive of the inestimable privileges of the Liberty of Speech and of the Press and as an attack on the Constitution of 1688. And as a duty we owe to ourselves and posterity, we call on you as Legislators not to deprive us of these our ancient and undoubted Privileges; and that you will continue the enjoyment of our Constitution Liberties as the most effectual means of securing his Majesty's person...preserving internal peace and obtaining a due reverence to the Laws.

Your Petitioners, therefore most humbly hope and pray that this honourable House, influenced by due regard to that Constitution, which insures to Englishmen their valuable privileges, as their Birthright, will prevent such pernicious law from becoming a part of the Law of the Land.

It was also resolved, that the Honourable THOMAS ERSKINE be requested to present the said Petition.

That these Resolutions be inserted in Portsmouth and London Papers.

D. HOWARD CHAIRMAN

Also the thanks of this Meeting be given to the CHAIRMAN for his spirited and Independent conduct on the present occasion

Portsea printed by James Horsey

Appendix D

An Extract from The History of Two Acts (1796) pp 655-656

PORTSMOUTH AND PORTSEA COUNTER PETITION

MR. EDITOR,

IN order that the public may form a true opinion of the measures that the Ministry and their dependants have been obliged to adopt to procure Petitions in favour of the destable Bills now pending in Parliament, I have sent a lift and a description of the persons who set on foot the Counter Petition of the Inhabitants of Portsmouth and Portsea, which was presented to the House of Commons on Friday, the 27th of November, by Mr. Rose jun, in opposition to that against the Bills from the free and Independent agreed to at a Public Meeting, consisting of near a thousand persons, and presented by Mr. Erskine, the 24th of November, I have sent this as a proof that comes within my own knowledge.

VERA~~X~~

Elias Arnaud, (Chairman) father of the Collector.

E.B. Arnaud, Collector of the Customs.

George Stiles, Clerk in the Customs House.

J. Boyes, Officer in ditto.

J.C. Mottley, ditto in ditto.

R. Kent, was ditto in ditto, now superannuated.

T. Trotter, Physician to the Fleet.

T. Meik, ditto, to the Garrison.

L. Taswell, Surgeon to ditto.

H. Gibbs, ditto in the Army.

J. Rickman, ditto of Marines.
 W.S. Cooper, Agent Victualler.
 Wm. Reeks, Clerk in the Victualling Office.
 C. Hawker, ditto in the Dock Yard.
 W. Grant, son of the Clerk of Cheque in the Dock Yard.
 J. Crocker, Quarterman in the Dock Yard.
 J. Johnstone, resident Commissioner of Haslemere Royal Hospital.
 J. Mottley, Barber to the sick, at ditto.
 T. Palmer, Purser in the Navy and Agent to Forton Prison.
 A. Moody, Contractor for Corn.
 J. Holmes, ditto for Cartage.
 G. Poore, ditto, under the Ordnance Office.
 Wm. Mitchell, ditto for Cooperage.
 J. Snook, ditto for Biscuits.
 D. Garrett, ditto for Beer to supply Hilsea Barracks.
 W. Garrett, ditto ditto.
 G. Garrett, ditto ditto.
 J. Deacon, ditto for Beer to supply the Convicts.
 W. Decon, ditto ditto.
 J. Judson, ditto for Biscuit.
 W. Hammond, ditto Army Clothing.
 Wm. Turner, Grocer to the Navy.
 W. Greetham, jun, Deputy Judge Advocate.
 George Gayton, Vice Admiral of the White.
 R.P. Cooper, Yellow Admiral.
 G. Grant, Purser in the Navy.
 W. Syme, Lieutenant in the Navy.
 Wm. Howell, Chaplain in the Navy.
 W.J. Madden, Paymaster and Captain of Marines.

S. Wilson, late Sutler to the Marines.

H. Deacon, Officer in the Artillery.

T. Deacon, ditto.

J.T. Merrill, son of the ~~late Agent to Haslar~~ Hospital.

R. Wilks, one of the Fencible Cavalry.

Wm. Urry, ditto ditto.

H. Allen, ditto ditto.

J. Swinbourn, Pensioner.

Appendix E

Extract from the Portsmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser for 30th
November, 1795.

PORTSMOUTH

November 21, 1795

At a Meeting at the Crown Inn of the Persons whose Names are hereto
subscribed, to take into Consideration

A Petition voted at a Public Meeting, convened at
the Beneficial Society's Hall, Portsea, on the last
Evening, by an anonymous Hand Bill, expressive of
their decided disapprobation of the Convention Bills
(as they are therein stiled) and pretending to be
the sense of the Independant Inhabitants of the
Towns of Portsmouth and Portsea, and the Vicinity,

It was resolved,

That a Public Meeting of the REAL Friends of the Constitution
should be at Town Hall, Portsmouth at eleven o'clock in the morning, on
Monday next, to approve of and sign a Petition to The Honourable House
of Commons, expressive of their Approbation of the Bills now pending in
Parliament, the one entitled An Act for the Preservation of His Majesty's
Person, and the other, For preventing Seditious Assemblies, in order to
shew the firm Attachement of the Inhabitants of these towns to our most
gracious Sovereign, and to the Constitution, of which he forms the principal
Estate, and their aversion and abhorrence to the leading points stated in
the first mentioned Petition, which is calculated to mislead the unwary

and ~~unconsiderate~~, and to create anarchy and confusion in this country:

The FRIENDS of Order and good Government are therefore earnestly entreated to come forward and put their signatures to the proposed Petition, that it may be ~~timely~~ presented.

E. Arnaud	R. Wilkes	W. Deacon
J. Johnston	J. Fowler	J. Boyes
T. Meik	W. Urry	A. Boyes
L. Taswell	G. Poore	J. Diaper
W. Baker	W. Howell	R. Kent
M. Greetham, Jun.	J.T. Merrett	W. Syme
W.J. Madden	H. Allen	J. Swinburn
H. Gibbs	R.P. Cooper	J. Hickley
E.B. Arnaud	W. Mitchell	J. Bradley
W. Turner	G. Grant	S. Wilson
G. Gayton	W. Grant	R. Phillipson
W.S. Cooper	P. Adams	T. Palmer
A. Moody	J. Snook	W. Doldson
J. Rickman	J. Mottley	C. Seccombe
W. Hammond	J.C. Mottley	T. Crocker
G. Stills	D. Garrett	H. Hawker
J. Money	W. Garrett	C. Deacon
J. Holmes	G. Garrett	T. Trotter
W. Newman	W. Reeks	J. Judson
J. Pinhorn	J. Deacon	

In consequence of the above Resolution a very numerous and respectable Meeting was held this day at the Guildhall of the Borough of Portsmouth -

Mr. Arnaud was called to the Chair. The Meeting was then opened - the following Petition read - largely approved - and immediately signed by the company present

To the Honourable the COMMONS of GREAT BRITAIN,
in Parliament assembled.

The humble PETITION of the LOYAL INHABITANTS of the Towns of PORTSMOUTH and PORTSEA, and their NEIGHBOURHOOD,

Humbly sheweth,

That a Petition, stated to be from the Inhabitants of the Towns of Portsmouth and Portsea, and the vicinity expressive of their decided disapprobation of the Convention Bills (as they are therein styled,) is intended to be presented to your Honourable House; and seeing, with Indignation, that the same is pretended to contain the Sense of the Independent Inhabitants of these Towns, your Petitioners find themselves under the necessity of offering their humble sentiments in Contradiction thereto.

THAT observing the Spirit of Innovation, and the Licentiousnes of the Times, require the deliberate Exertions of all true Friends and Well-Wishers to their Country; your Petitioners feel infinite happiness in reflecting that Parliament has, in its Wisdom, thought proper to propose two Bills, which absolutely necessary to suppress the seditous sentiments, now so audaciously and publicly avowed; and which, they trust will answer the truely desirable purposes of securing our beloved Monarch from Insult, and from the atrocious Attempts and Wicked Machinations of disaffected and dangerous Persons.

That the Suppression of those Meetings, in which Sedition is

incalculated by the most crafty Devices and Insidious Arguments, calculated to mislead the unwary and uninformed, and to stimulate the discontented to Acts of Treason and Rebellion, appears to be exceedingly expedient which your Petitioners sincerely hope the Bills in question will happily produce without abridging the real and essential Liberties of the Subject; and that their Effects will only be felt by those Persons, who, by their Actions or ~~Illusive~~ Doctrines, may attempt to seduce others from their Allegiance to their Most Gracious Sovereign, and from a due Reverence to the *laws* .

That your Petitioners finally beg leave to avail themselves of this Opportunity to declare, in the most unequivocal Terms, their Determination to come forward in a legal Manner, and to exert themselves upon all Occasions to the utmost of their Power, to guard their most Gracious Sovereign, and every Branch of his Illustrious House from all Seditious and Treasonable Attempts, and to preserve their glorious Constitution inviolate, that it may be transmitted to Posterity, as it has been handed down by their Ancestors, the ENVY & ADMIRATION OF THE WORLD, and the PRIDE and GLORY of ENGLISHMEN.

THAT, influenced by these considerations, your Petitioners humbly pray that the Bills now pending in Parliament may be speedily passed into Laws.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound,
will ever pray.

It was then resolved, That the above Petition should be left at the Guildhall, and at the Concert Room; in the Town of Portsea, for the signatures of those other loyal Inhabitants who could not attend the Meeting.

It was also resolved, That the Petition be presented by Sir W. Heathcote, Bart, and William Chute, Esq. the Representatives in Parliament for the County.

It was also resolved, That the Thanks of the Meeting should be given to Sir John Carter (the Deputy Mayor) for the use of the Guildhall for the above laudable purpose.

ELIAS ARNAUD, Chairman.

It was also resolved, That the Thanks of the Meeting be given to the Chairman for his Conduct.

Portsmouth November 23, 1795.

Appendix F

Extract from the Portsmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser November 30, 1795.

LOST

SOMEWHERE betwixt Portsea and Portsmouth, a most IMPORTANT PAPER, of which the following is an exact copy:-

"Minutes of the Proceedings of the Jacobin Society, held at

- , November - , 1795

"CITIZEN LAST, in the Chair

"THE order of the night being to read the latest advices from France, the Chairman begged to decline complying with it, as he was always too fond of liberty to be compelled to learn his A.B.C.

- (At burst of applause from the whole Society)

"DEPUTY PARCHMENT was called upon to execute the talk; when he took up the letters and proceeded as follows:

"CITIZENS,

"Paris Pluv 10th

"Cry a loud and spare not - Now is your time or never - if you suffer the Bills to pass you are ruined - Petition, remonstrate, threaten, and lie thro' thick and thin - or George and his Ministers will gain their point, which will be the inevitable ~~run~~ of both our causes. Remember that on your exertions our very existence, as a Republic, rests - Health and fraternity.

TALLIEN"

CITIZENS AND FRIENDS,

Paris Pluv 14th

"In your zeal for the good cause do not lose sight of your prudence, nor of the original design of all your measures, viz. the Destruction of Monarchy, and the Establishment of a Republic upon French principles. In all your publications, stick up for the King and Constitution, but take the first opportunity of following our example. Impress the poor with high notions of their consequence - sow discord between them and the wealthy - Tell them there is no real Independence without Poverty. It is a new doctrine, and its novelty will render it fashionable. A little patience and the riches of the whole nation will fall into your hands. Then you will have ample revenge for the injuries you have so long sustained from your cruel and hard hearted task-masters.

Yours

SEYES"

"The above Letters were received with repeated and loud plaudits, and it was resolved that the Thanks of this Meeting be transmitted by the usual conveyance, to Citizen Tallien and Seyes for their friendly communications.

"The Chairman having represented that the falsehoods which had been propagated against the bills for punishing Sedition, began to lose their effect, and that the people now seemed to think them necessary, an extraordinary meeting of the Lying Committee was decreed, for the purpose of exciting, by new devices and extraordinary means, the popular clamour against them. It was resolved, at the same time, that the Lying Committee had deserved well of their country.

"CITIZEN STRAP now ascended the tribune (allas a joint stool) and addressed the Meeting in the following impressive words:

"FELLOW CRAFT,

"A new light breaks in upon me: If to be poor is to be independent, I feel myself as great and consequential as any man in the kingdom. I have ruined myself, by my endeavours to ruin the state. I have lost all my business - I have not a second shirt to my back - My wife and children are starving, and I am over head and ears in debt" - if this is not the height and summit of Independence, why then there's no such thing as Independence in the world. - What an undone lost nation is that which compels its best patriots to be wretched - such a nation is ours, and such a patriot is myself, poor Jack Strap, the cobbler: but I scorn to complain:- nay I glory in my sufferings; for if I was not so completely miserable I should not be so completely independent -
(Bravo! Bravo! resounded from every part of the room)

"A deputation from the ancient fraternity of Beggars at this instant attended at the door, announcing themselves as by far the most Independent members of the community. They were immediately admitted to the honour of a sitting and received the fraternal embrace.

"A desultory debate followed; after which it was resolved finally, that the Society shall continue to treat the Kingly Office and Government with an appearance of respect in their writings; but that in conversations and at their several meetings, they each and all of them do everything in their power to render both the one and the other contemptible and odious; to prepare the minds of the people at large for the grand, sublime, and wonderful changes that are at hand.

(Signed) The Mark X of LEWIS LAST, Chairman".

Whoever shall find and bring the original Paper to the Crier, shall receive a Pair of New Shoes, the Thanks of the Society, and a Fraternal Hug for his pains.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Despite Portsmouth's political idiosyncracies (its Dissenting Whig elite and their almost total political exclusiveness), and its unusual, though not unique, population structure, Portsmouth differed from other towns because of its role as a naval base. Economically Portsmouth contrasted with other ports and towns because it was dominated by a single industrial unit and had none of the varied processing industries which gave the major seaports diversified economies. Consequently it lacked a large and powerful mercantile and financial group concerned with shipping, manufacture or commerce. Instead Portsmouth contained a large population of industrial workers.

In an age when most men worked in agriculture and when those who were involved in manufacturing still generally plied their trade in a small workshop, the Naval Dock Yards provided the unique experience of employment in a large integrated and long established industrial unit. Based on this experience the Yard workers developed a set of shared attitudes which may be described as "communal self reliance". This outlook led to the adoption of collective action as a dominant mode of social and economic behaviour. Collective action was displayed in a variety of forms: ad hoc unionism, co-operatives, boycotts and even crime. In certain instances this sort of behaviour was extended to involve the Yard worker with other groups. In industrial matters the Yard men were capable of co-operating with shipbuilding workers along the south coast and Thames. Also, they joined in the administration of certain aspects of local government. The involvement of many individualsⁱⁿ crime probably created an inextricable network of relationships between the Yard employees and civilian workmen and tradesmen. Even

so, the cohesiveness of the Yard workmen resulted in a certain conservatism and isolation. The Yard workers failed to respond to political radicalism and the Spithead mutiny.

Locally the men who worked in the Dock Yard were clearly identifiable as a group for they were known collectively as the "Yard People".

This title is no empty tribute to their solidarity. Though the workforce of the yard was broadly structured into a hierarchy, topped by the shipwrights, it was not rent by these divisions into isolated and mutually antagonistic occupational groups. The very number of skilled men and the diverse roles they fulfilled militated against the development within the yard of a restricted labour elite. Thus in all major issues the Yard labour force displayed considerable unity and conducted its affairs with an egalitarian spirit.

A certain rude equality was common among the eighteenth century labouring poor; yet until the advent of the corresponding societies it had its limits. Normally trade societies conducted their affairs democratically but only qualified members of the trade were enfranchised and such societies were highly exclusive. Some trades were more "aristocratic" than others and even single trades contained an elite who stood aloof from their fellow craftsmen. Such divisions appear to have been partially and temporarily removed when the radical organisations were formed during the 1790's. However, as it has been shown that the Portsmouth Yard workers resisted popular radicalism, their egalitarianism could not stem from this source. In fact, though the skilled Yard workers may have been liberal in co-operating with unskilled workmen they drew a division between men employed in the Yard and those outside. What was it, we may therefore ask, that enabled the Yard workers to adopt their place of employment as a source of collective identity and

not locality trade or class?

Through their solidarity, their role in the local economy as wage earners and the suppliers of stolen naval stores, and the part they played in local government, the Yard workers formed a dominant group in Portsmouth. However they were unable to appropriate entirely the town to themselves. In the first instance the nature of political power in the eighteenth century barred them from ultimate control of local government. Moreover, local politics were so oligarchic as to exclude all but the Carter faction from a role in Borough government, though other groups including the Dock Yard workers entered parish affairs. Secondly, though the Yard people were numerous they were still a minority of the towns working population. No other group of workingmen, however, was so large, so well organised, or had enough solidarity and administrative experience to challenge the Yard men. Even so, there was room for conflict. Involvement in parish administration led to friction between the Yard workers and the Vestry of St. Thomas. It also created some ill feeling among the parish's tradesmen over the poor rate. The division between Yard employees and small businessmen may have been made greater, despite a shared criminality, by the latter's role as creditors and the Yard People's active consumer consciousness. Further, the Dock Yard workers may have regarded other groups, immigrants, transients and service personnel, as a threat to their neighbourhood's stability and good order.

In short, the Yard People were unable to extend their hegemony over the entire town because they were neither numerous enough nor allied closely with other groups of similar status, yet they were important enough to form more than just an isolated sub-community. Though many of the Yard workers' institutions rested on their place of employment they still interacted with other people in the town to a

considerable degree. Unable, however, to control the town it was by reference to the Yard rather than to Portsmouth, or even Portsea, that the Naval workers identified themselves. It was the nature of employment in the Yard that prevented its workers from developing either consciousness of themselves as members of trade groups or as members of a more general class.

We have seen that by 1815 workmen in H.M. Dock Yards were a hired labour force paid by the week and with little or no control over their working conditions. This was not the result of a rapid process. The Yardmen had not been independent craftsmen in 1793 only to be transmuted to wage labourers in 1815. In many ways the reforms of the early eighteen hundreds were a development of the trends working throughout the previous century. Resistance against "modernization" had been made, unsuccessfully, by the workmen in the seventeen-seventies when the shipwrights had attempted to withstand the introduction of piece-rates. The shipwright defeat was only partial; for, as we have seen, the nature of the piece-work system had been changed in favour of the shipwrights by the modus vivendi existing between the Yard Officers and the craftsmen.

It was the nature of the relationship between the Dock Yard authorities and the Yard workmen that prevented the latter being either reduced to the level of factory hands or split into isolated trade groups. The Yard Officers were managers of a concern which did not exist to make a profit but to pursue a transcending goal, the successful prosecution of a war. Whether the Yard Officers and workmen stood united by patriotism is difficult to say but they did share a common interest in a quiet life. Moreover, managerial functions in the Dock Yard were diffuse and a minor supervisory role might be aspired to by

many employees. The achievement of the Yard was not measured in terms of loss or gain. Therefore, the relationship between managers and workers could not easily be seen in terms of exploitation. Further, it was difficult to measure the efficiency or productivity of the Yard, - so that rational management techniques could be thwarted. However much men like Samuel Bentham wished to rationalise the Dock Yards, in both material and social terms, Laissez-Faire accountancy was excluded for as long as there was the more urgent need to fight an enemy. The war both created pressures which prompted reorganisation and the demand that the war be prosecuted without hindrance. The necessity of keeping the navy at sea and the Dock Yards working, led to a pragmatism on the part of the Yard authorities which prevented reforms being taken to their logical conclusion. It would be revealing to examine the Dock Yards in the post war period in order to determine whether the reforms begun in the early part of the century were pursued as part of a generalised demand for efficiency and modernisation or if once the pressure of war ceased, the compulsion to change disappeared. Be that as it may, our main point is that the relationship between the Yard authorities and workers was not generally an exploitive one and that there was resistance to demands for efficiency which might have made for greater exploitation. Similarly there was no element of exploitation in the relations between groups of workmen. Skilled craftsmen were wage earners in the same way as a labourer was. The artisan did not hire his own unskilled assistance; this was provided, paid and controlled by the Yard authorities. The only exploitive relationship that might be thought to exist was in the case of a workman and his apprentice. Even here the relationship of master and apprentice might parallel that of father and son and was in any case carefully supervised by the Dock Yard

authorities.

Subject to a common employer and similar general working conditions, it was easy for Dock Yard employees to be more aware of their common interests and experiences than the differences, based on trade and occupation.

Though the civilian artizans who enrolled themselves in radical organisations were beginning to show some consciousness of class, this was far from a generalised phenomena so that we would not necessarily expect the Yardmen to identify themselves in class terms. Even so, it is worth remembering that the Yard workers' economic and social position was based on Government service paid for from revenues raised by highly regressive taxes. Thus the Dock Yard men were the direct beneficiaries of high war taxation which added to the distress caused by the war among the labouring poor. This privileged position, their own internal cohesion and the a-typicality of their industrial situation explains why the men employed in Portsmouth Dock Yard stood apart from the organisations which were helping to make the English Working Class.

Underpinning much of what has been said about the Dock Yard workers solidarity is the likelihood that they were closely linked by blood and marriage. Artizans commonly entered their sons in the Yard, as has been

noted, and the same family names recur frequently in the Yard's records. Indeed in 1859 a Parliamentary Commission on the Dock Yards complained of "... family clanships, which at present prevail in the dockyards throughout the service"¹. The effects that this situation could have had on Yard unity may have been considerable. Much of the Yard's coinesiveness could be explained if men in different trades, occupations and official positions were related. However, investigation along these lines would require family reconstitution and collective biography. Some preliminary data collection indicates the size of these tasks. A list of over 3,000 names has been compiled and between 1 and 12 items of information have been logged to each name. It is impossible to estimate the total amount of information which the Yard archives would yield if they were searched exhaustively.

Another important area of research that needs to be undertaken is a study of the Dock Yards in peacetime. In particular it would be valuable to supplement this study by an examination of the Dock Yard and Portsmouth in the post-war years. Understandably the Yard was more interesting and exciting during periods of hostility but the exclusion of peace time periods gives a highly partial view of the Dock Yards. It would also be interesting to compare Portsmouth with another Dock Yard town. However, the archives for Chatham and Plymouth Yards do not rival Portsmouth's.

As far as the history of Portsmouth is concerned this thesis presents a rather one dimensional view. Attention has been concentrated on a single occupational group though efforts have been made to prevent this creating too distorted a picture. Although it would be useful to know much more about Portsmouth's social structure, we probably know more about Portsmouth's Yard workers than about the working population of any other town at this date.

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